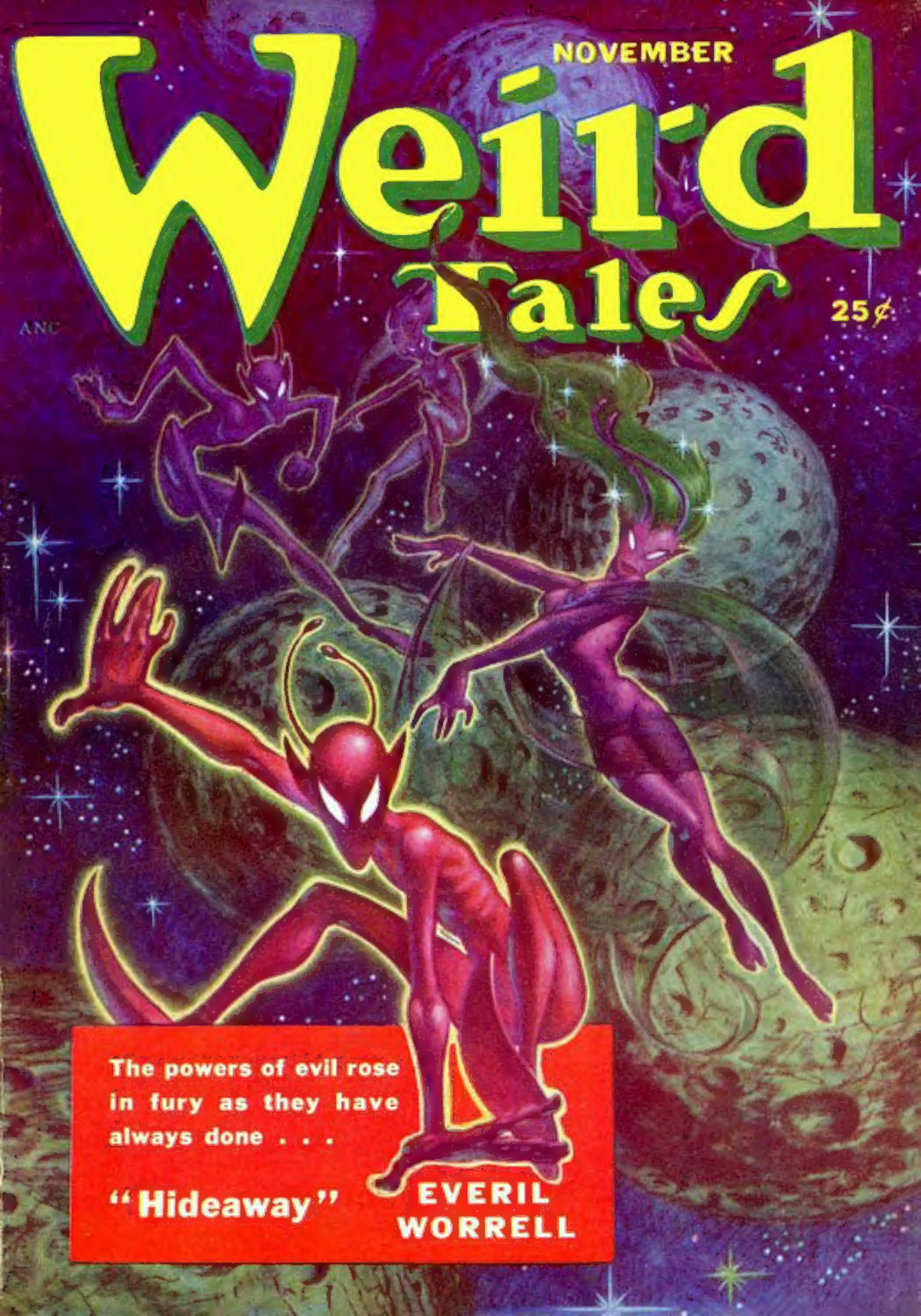
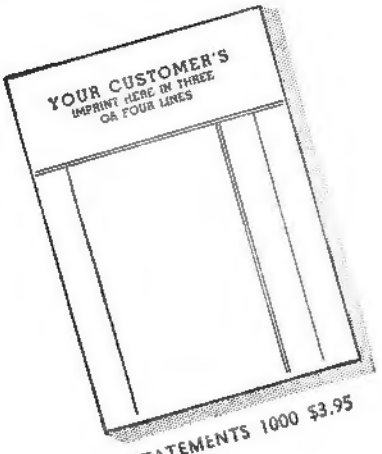

NOVEMBER
Weird Tales
25¢
The powers of evil rose in fury as they have always done . . .
"Hideaway"
EVERIL WORRELL

Do You Want EXTRA MONEY?

We can show you how to turn your spare hours into EXTRA MONEY. HARD CASH—to help you meet the high cost of living. No previous selling experience necessary—and you will not interfere with your regular job. Pick your own hours —put in as much or as little time as you wish.

SELL PRINTING

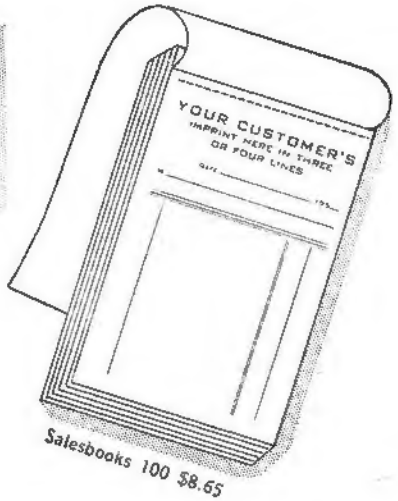
PART TIME FULL TIME



STATEMENTS 1000 $3.95

ENVELOPES 1000 $5.65

Business Cards 1000 $2.95



Salesbooks 100 $8.65

THERE IS EXTRA MONEY FOR YOU! RIGHT IN YOUR OWN HOME TOWN

With our line of easy to sell business stationery you can add to your present income without interfering with your regular work. Take orders and collect big advance commissions in your SPARE TIME. No priority worries. Fast deliveries made right to your customers direct.

FREE Sales Kit Your only investment will be a few spare hours every week. You will be amazed to see how you can convert those extra hours into EXTRA MONEY for yourself. We furnish complete selling kit with attractive displays of business printing. Merchandise that your neighborhood business people use every day.

You do not have to make any cash investment, carry any stock, do any delivering, or finance any accounts.

Many of our full time agents—now in the BIG MONEY CLASS —started out with us working spare time and found out they could make more money selling for National Press than at their regular work. THIS MAY BE YOUR BIG OPPORTUNITY.

NATIONAL PRESS
NORTH CHICAGO, ILL.

JUST SEND NAME
NATIONAL PRESS, Dept. 51051
North Chicago, Illinois.

Rush me your Free Sales Kit. No charges now or ever. Everything you send me now is FREE

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

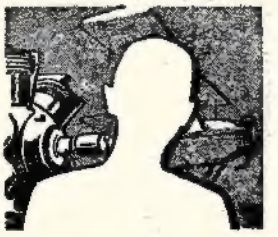
CITY..... ZONE... STATE.....

Put yourself in the I.C.S. HALL OF FAME*

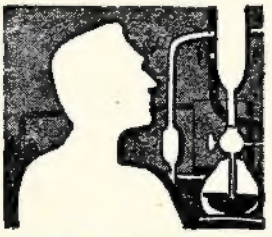
PRESIDENT of a leading airline.

CHAIRMAN of an important national defense board.

INVENTOR of a well-known U. S. Army rifle.

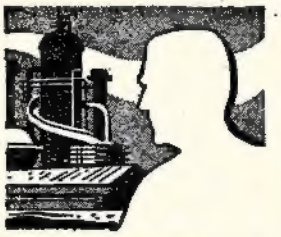


DESIGNER of a famous aircraft engine.



CHEMICAL director of nationally known research laboratory.

ENGINEER in charge of a famous company's engineering laboratory.



GENERAL MANAGER of one of America's largest chemical companies.

YOU

JOIN these men who have made their mark! Men who by dint of ambition, intelligence and sound, practical I. C. S. training now enjoy positions of leadership in business and industry.

The sooner you start, the better your chances of making the grade. Right now, with the critical shortage of skilled labor, trained men are becoming leaders overnight. Hundreds of I. C. S. students are reporting promotions and pay increases, earning greater security for themselves and their families. How about marking and mailing the coupon today?

**Names and positions sent on request.*

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3279-P, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Refrigeration, Domestic
- ☐ Refrigeration & Air Conditioning
- ☐ Steam Fitting

Aeronautics Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting & Design
- ☐ Aircraft Mechanic
- ☐ Engine Mechanic

Automotive Courses
- ☐ Automobile
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Auto Electric Technician
- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding & Refinishing

Chemical Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Food-Plant Sanitation
- ☐ Petroleum Refining
- ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering and Architectural Courses
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Lighting Technician
- ☐ Practical Electrician

Diesel Engines Courses
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Internal Combustion Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Forging
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Instrumentation
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Machine Shop
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Locomotive Machinist
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman
- ☐ Steam-Diesel Locomotive Eng.

Stationary Engineering Courses
- ☐ Power Plant Engineering
- ☐ Stationary Fireman
- ☐ Stationary Steam Engineering

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Loom Fixing
- ☐ Rayon Mfg.
- ☐ Textile Engineering
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Fashion & Book Illustration
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Motor Traffic
- ☐ Personnel—Labor Relations
- ☐ Postal Civil Service
- ☐ Retailing
- ☐ Retail Business Management
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Present Position_____ Employed by_____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

NOVEMBER, 1951 Cover by Frank Kelly Freas

NOVELETTES

HIDEAWAY . . . . . **Everil Worrell** 6
A weird little country widely associated with stormy politics and legends of vampire and werewolf.

PIGEONS FROM HELL . . . . . **Robert E. Howard** 62
Who is that roams the house at night, that fumbles at one's door knob, who whistles weirdly and sweetly? Must one be mad to know?

SHORT STORIES

THE BRIDES OF BAXTER CREEK . . . . . **C. J. Barr** 24
How about if one's dream house is haunted?

DAGON . . . . . **H. P. Lovecraft** 32
There comes to me a hideously vivid vision in reply to my own question—could it all have been a pure phantasm?

THE BIRD . . . . . **Margaret St. Clair** 36
The fire burned emerald and turquoise and seemed to be all that Dwight Thompson wanted out of life.

HECTOR . . . . . **Michael West** 42
Yet on the whole, Hector's ghost didn't look any the worse for wear.

THE NIGHT THEY CRASHED THE PARTY . . . . . **Robert Bloch** 45
I saw everything—including my own puzzled, frightened face in the mirror.

FLING THE DUST ASIDE . . . . . **Seabury Quinn** 51
. . . a slow easy descent of his body, soft as the downward wafting of a feather shed by a soaring bird.

WAS IT MURDER? . . . . . **H. C. McNeile** 79
"Even though I knew the awful deed was to be committed, I was powerless to intervene."

WHEN THE NIGHT WIND HOWLS . **L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt** 86
. . . a somewhat unnerving experience to be a focus of attraction in a growing group of people who look as though they had just come from a graveyard

VERSE
HALLOWE'EN CANDLE . . . . . **Yetza Gillespie** 41
UNEXPIATED . . . . . **Harriet A. Bradfield** 85

WEIRD TALES CLUB 91

THE EYRIE 93

DAGON—Copyright 1923 Rural Publishing Co.
PIGEONS FROM HELL—Copyright 1938 by Popular Fiction Publishing Co.
WAS IT MURDER?—Copyright 1933 by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

Published bi-monthly by WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, $1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

Copyright, 1951, by WEIRD TALES. Copyright in Great Britain.
Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

178
PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. Vol. 44, No. 1

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

Labor Day or Any Day

Lee WORK CLOTHES

ARE PREFERRED FOR LONG WEAR, COMPLETE COMFORT AND SMART APPEARANCE...

BUY LEE WORK CLOTHES for the *greatest satisfaction* you've ever experienced. They're TOUGH; built to stand the *hardest wear in any job* and give you satisfying comfort and smart appearance even after repeated launderings.

Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back

Union-Made Sanforized

Sold By Leading Retail Stores Coast-to-Coast

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY, Inc.

Kansas City, Mo. Minneapolis, Minn. Trenton, N. J.
San Francisco, Calif. South Bend, Ind.

Lee
Highest Quality
WORK CLOTHES

COPR. 1951
THE H. D. LEE CO., INC.

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF UNION-MADE WORK CLOTHES

THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a positive *demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

This *Free* Book Points Out the Way

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. *They will show* you how to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. *Use the coupon below* and send for a copy of the fascinating sealed *free* book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

Scribe B. H. T. The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

Kindly send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." I am interested in learning how I may receive instructions about the full use of my natural powers.

Name.....

Address.....State.....

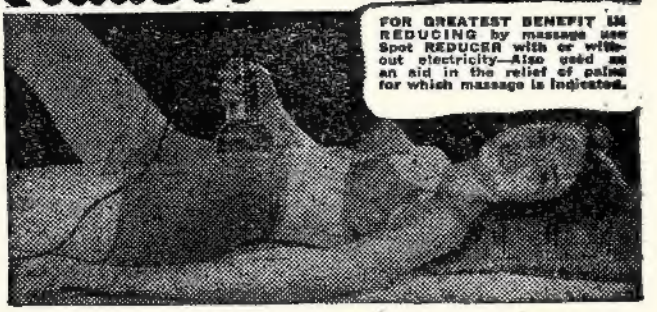
Reducing Specialist Says:

LOSE WEIGHT Where It Shows Most REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY APPROVED

Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing Penetrating Massage



FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use Spot REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

PLUG IN GRASP HANDLE AND APPLY

Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

Don't Stay FAT—You Can LOSE POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY Without Risking HEALTH

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

Your Own Private Masseur at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters laboratory approved.

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $8.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. E-674

1025 Broad St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE—check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

CAN'T SLEEP

Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

MUSCULAR ACHES:

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

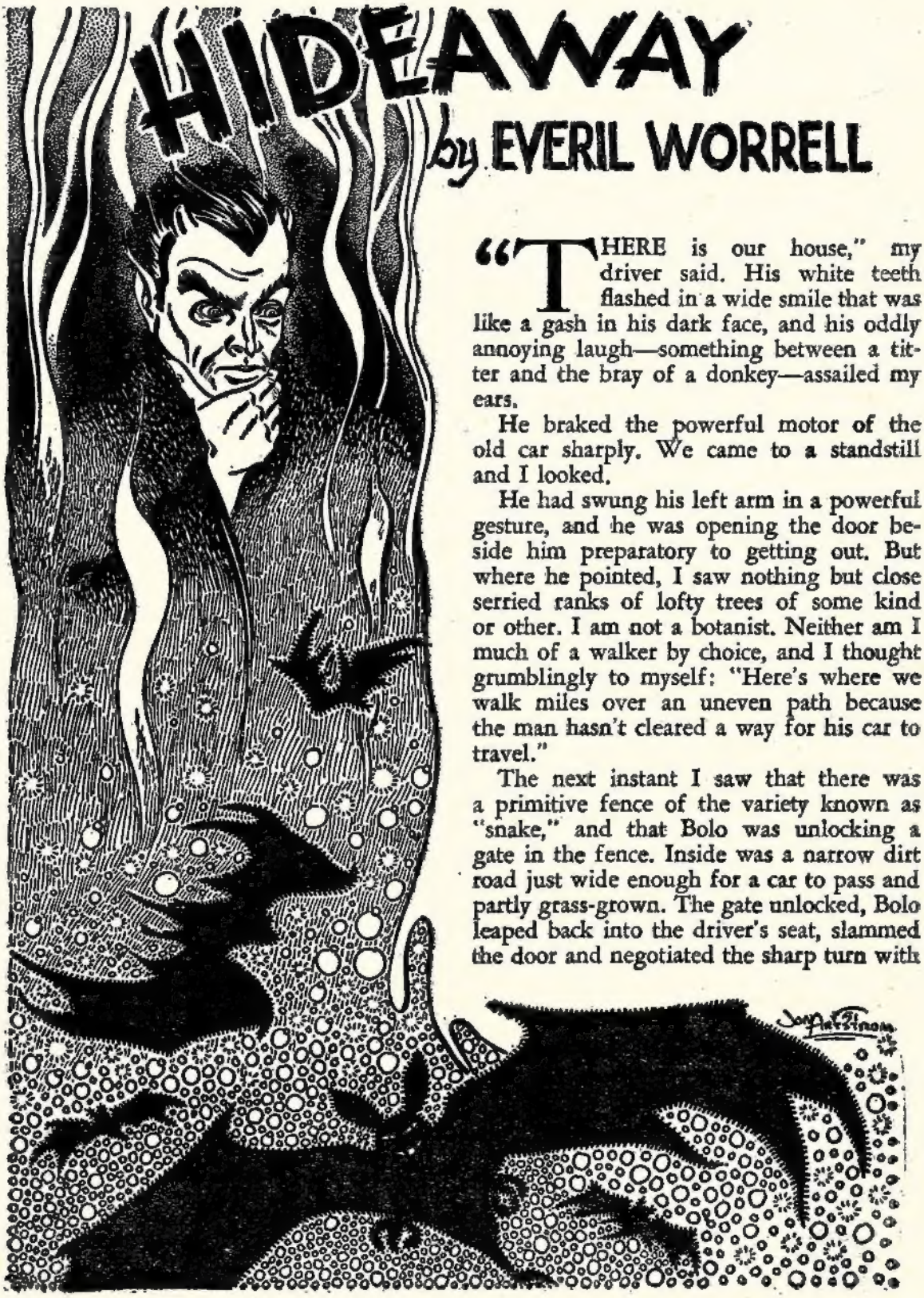
USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY!

HIDEAWAY

by EVERIL WORRELL



"THERE is our house," my driver said. His white teeth flashed in a wide smile that was like a gash in his dark face, and his oddly annoying laugh—something between a titter and the bray of a donkey—assailed my ears.

He braked the powerful motor of the old car sharply. We came to a standstill and I looked.

He had swung his left arm in a powerful gesture, and he was opening the door beside him preparatory to getting out. But where he pointed, I saw nothing but close serried ranks of lofty trees of some kind or other. I am not a botanist. Neither am I much of a walker by choice, and I thought grumblingly to myself: "Here's where we walk miles over an uneven path because the man hasn't cleared a way for his car to travel."

The next instant I saw that there was a primitive fence of the variety known as "snake," and that Bolo was unlocking a gate in the fence. Inside was a narrow dirt road just wide enough for a car to pass and partly grass-grown. The gate unlocked, Bolo leaped back into the driver's seat, slammed the door and negotiated the sharp turn with

. . . where even today the common people believe in vampires and werewolves, in wizards and witches.

another gleam of white teeth and another wave of the hand.

The gate, however, was not left open. He felt it necessary once more to leap from the car, carefully shoot home the bolt of the padlock and of course climb back into his place again. No intrusion was to be encouraged, obviously; although what there was to tempt an intruder, I wondered.

Looking ahead I believed we were a mile short of anything resembling a human habitation, when I saw it.

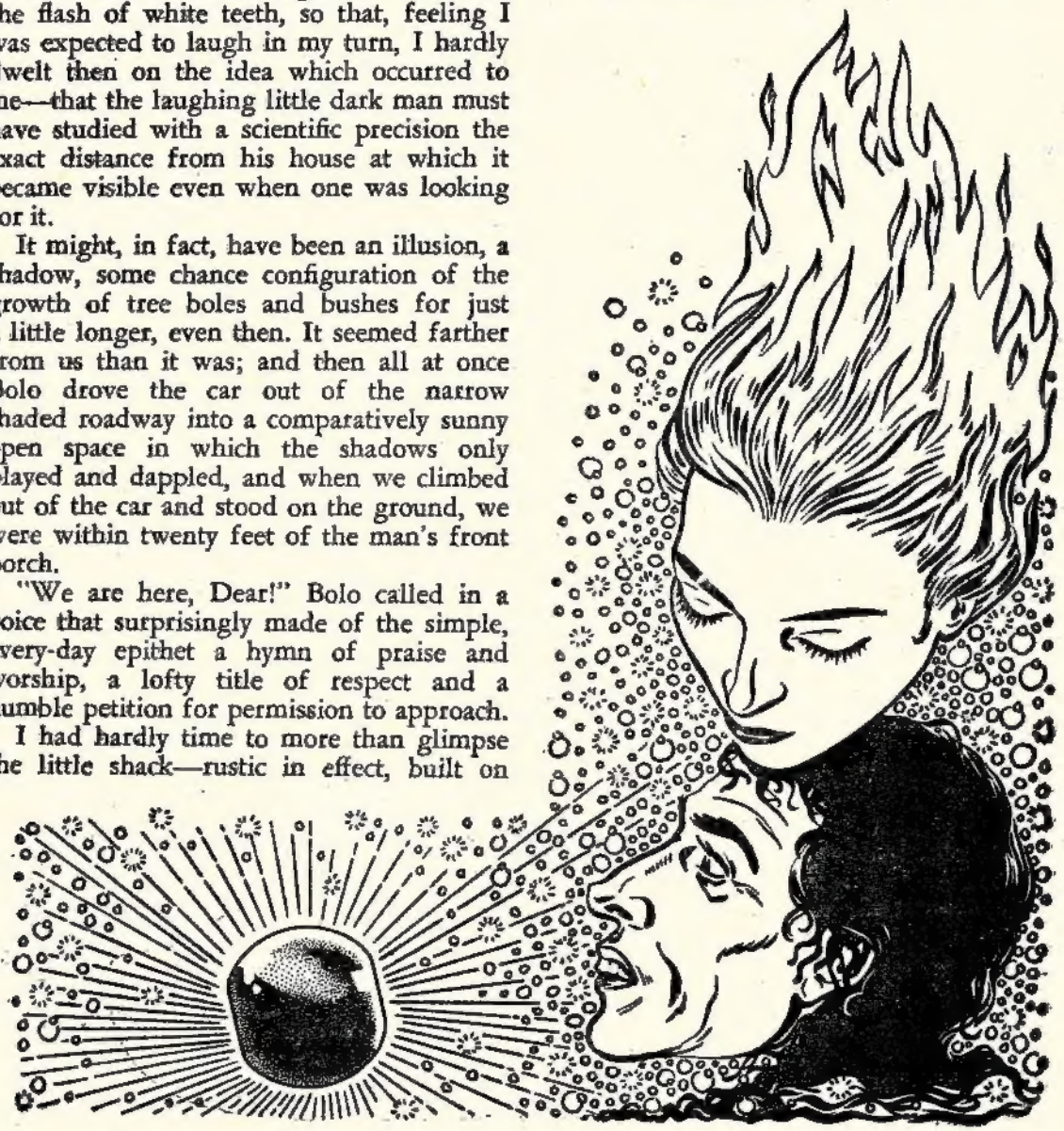
"*Now* you see!" Bolo cried at the very instant when I did. And again the titter and the flash of white teeth, so that, feeling I was expected to laugh in my turn, I hardly dwelt then on the idea which occurred to me—that the laughing little dark man must have studied with a scientific precision the exact distance from his house at which it became visible even when one was looking for it.

It might, in fact, have been an illusion, a shadow, some chance configuration of the growth of tree boles and bushes for just a little longer, even then. It seemed farther from us than it was; and then all at once Bolo drove the car out of the narrow shaded roadway into a comparatively sunny open space in which the shadows only played and dappled, and when we climbed out of the car and stood on the ground, we were within twenty feet of the man's front porch.

"We are here, Dear!" Bolo called in a voice that surprisingly made of the simple, every-day epithet a hymn of praise and worship, a lofty title of respect and a humble petition for permission to approach.

I had hardly time to more than glimpse the little shack—rustic in effect, built on stilts like a house in the tropics, porch-furnished with box furniture—when a woman appeared and began tripping down the flimsy board steps to meet us.

"They live alone out there. They seem to be husband and wife, all right; but there's a rumor that he may actually be her servant. He speaks of her sometimes in a way that has given rise to that rumor. Yet he always refers to her as 'my wife' and with great pride. Once he told a fellow worker in the laboratory where he is an aid that his wife was the most beautiful woman in the world."



Heading by Jon Arfstrom

That had been part of my briefing in regard to the Bolos. (Bolo's first name at the plant, by the way, was "Juan"; nobody ever called him by other than his last name, like that, without a "Mr." It seemed to fit, and served as a plain cognomen, a mild epithet, and a pet name, in turn.)

The woman was graceful, as she negotiated the steps and walked to meet us. She was neither tall nor short—perhaps a shade taller than Bolo; and she was slender. Her skirts swung as she walked, but when I focused my eyes upon her face the odd light effect was gone, and I could meet her smile and take her outstretched hand.

I could do that, and I could return her greeting, which was gracious and welcoming, but for a split instant it was about all that I could do, because now I could see her face, and it shocked and startled me.

The most beautiful woman in the world? Bolo was overcompensating when he said that. Unless—surely he wasn't laughing at his wife, making a mean little joke nastily to himself about her?

Mrs. Bolo was not beautiful. In fact she looked a bit like a witch in some old story. Her face was seamed and fallen, heavily lined as with many years which the gay little curls denied. Her eyes, I thought, were keen and honest—whether they were also good I wasn't sure. Her mouth prejudiced me against any other features she could have had, for I've always been very sensitive to the beauty in a woman's mouth—when it is there; and repulsed when it isn't.

In this case, it wasn't. It was mostly teeth, huge "buck" teeth, which pushed aside the rather full lips and seemed a deformity in the middle of her face. It was merely a further detail that the lady's nose had been broken and not set straight again.

There were tables under the trees, and box-made chairs conveniently placed, and Mrs. Bolo asked me to sit with her while Bolo brought us cooling drinks.

"Men of the Orient and the Tropics love to wait upon their wives, and I think it's a charming custom, don't you, Mr.—?"

"Conant—" I supplied. "Miles Conant."

It was too cruel, too unfair, I was thinking. No woman should have a deal like this one—and there had been that moment's impression of bodily grace and sure-footedness, there was the clear directness of the gray eyes in which dwelt other qualities I couldn't fathom.

What I couldn't stop looking at was the poor lady's face. You have to look at the face of your hostess, don't you? You couldn't sit talking with her and avoid looking at her. You had to school your expression—in my profession that should be easy, but I wasn't sure of my success.

I was photographing the other ravaged features. No eyebrows—actually not any. An accident—say in an automobile—might have broken the nose and done something to the eyebrows. I wished she had painted some on. The curls seemed to have slipped sideways, and I believed Mrs. Bolo wore a wig, so she shouldn't have conscientious scruples about a little mascara.

The accident might have done something to the bony structure of the face also, and maybe the teeth were false. I decided that they *were* false; but if that were so, why not a better job?

She was talking to me in that rapid, social manner when Bolo brought the drinks. She had taken the initiative, it seemed, and she kept it. She was asking me just why the Government had sent me out to interview the two of them, and I was explaining—in part.

"Some of that laboratory work is important, and some of it is secret, and the plant handles some Government work," I told her.

"I'd regard it as pretty routine in Mr. Bolo's case. A routine loyalty check. Everybody is having them, you know. If Mr. Bolo were entrusted with the really special work, he'd have to be very thoroughly investigated, as of course you know. As it is, it's just a matter of routine. Nothing to worry about, at all."

That was true, so far as it went. There had been so many disclosures of spy rings, so many spy confessions, so much accusation and counter-accusation, that it had gotten so you couldn't trust the spies themselves. In fact the spies often seemed not to know quite what they were talking about—the head people had so many aliases and

used the names of so many reputable people, that pretty often they thought the members of their gangs were named Smith in all good faith, when actually, the name might be Jones.

So when anything really had to be looked into, it was done now pretty thoroughly, and by trained people. I am about as thoroughly trained an investigator as the Government commands, and the fate of the Bolos would really be in my hands. If I found Juan Bolo to be reliable and loyal, he was due for some of that important secret work. If I found otherwise, he was on his way out.

What I wasn't telling the Bolos was that, due entirely to the heavy veil of secrecy with which they had surrounded themselves, neither I nor my superiors expected him to get a clean bill of health from me, and what I had already seen didn't make things look brighter for the little man.

You don't camouflage yourself right off the face of the earth, usually, without a pretty good reason. And if Bolo and his wife were just what they seemed, they were too insignificant a couple to meed or warrant all of this. A mixed-race—yes; unless, after all, he was her servant—and that would be even stranger, wouldn't it? None of that was reason enough for "Hideaway" —appropriately, that was what they called their place.

TO SHORTEN my story, I won the cooperation of the Bolos—at least as much as they couldn't deny me. After all, they had to cooperate. They knew as well as I did that they had been watched, and that nobody knew quite what to make of them, and I think they were glad of a chance to show me a huge collection of papers establishing their harmlessness. Bolo kept them in a little steamer trunk; we went inside to look them over, and the place was the kind you'd expect a Malay to build. More box-furniture except for two plain iron bedsteads, everything plain, yet incongruously offset with knick-knacks, some cheap and some very fine indeed. A couple of hammered silver candle sticks, with blue shades edged with finely cut crystal dangles that tinkled if you touched them or a breeze blew through, were lovely things; a collection of dime-store love lamps which exuded perfume, and incense burners, went better with the furniture.

The papers proved Bolo to be a Malay who had applied for naturalization, who was legally married to one Eugenia Evans in New York five years ago (about the time of Bolo's entry into the United States).

There was more, and it all hung together. I had seen the inside of Malay shacks, and the atmosphere was right. Yet, papers can be fixed in various ways, and I came back in my mind to that initial reason for doubting the Bolos were what they said they were.

They were too secret about it. And their relationship to each other; that crack he had made about his beautiful wife—had he more than one of them? His waiting on Eugenia, though, hand and foot; like a man deeply in love or—maybe like a servant.

It was on my tongue to ask some very personal questions along these lines. I began, though, a little farther from dead center, because it isn't easy to ask a man in the presence of his wife why he had claimed her to be beautiful, if he has more than one wife, or why he behaves toward her the way he does. I asked him, instead, the name of their home.

"Hideaway!" he said boldly, laughing his strident laugh again, flashing teeth at me. "Good, that—Yes?"

"Yes—" I agreed, then suddenly caught my breath.

I had seen a picture in a silver frame.

It was of a woman standing on a balcony, and it was lovely. I recognized it. It is my business to recognize things like that—faces that have been news remain on file in my memory.

This woman in the picture had been queen of a little country seldom heard of, bordering on Transylvania, the weird little territory widely associated with vampire and werewolf legends, and also with stormy political happenings. Some of these happenings had forced the sudden abdication of this young queen some half a dozen years ago, and there had been rumors (they could only have arisen in some such part of

the world!) of a tribe of devil-worshippers having threatened her life. She had disappeared suddenly, as completely as if she had dissolved into thin air, and that gave some weight to the story about the devil worshippers—not that their existence is mere rumor, of course, since they exist in a number of countries. Anyway, interest had waned after a second rumor went around saying the Queen Maria had escaped from her kingdom with a lover, a commoner. A few speculative articles had appeared in a few Sunday magazine sections given to that sort of vaporizing, and her affair had been compared to that of the Duke of Windsor and his romance, and then the world had forgotten.

I had forgotten, too; but now I remembered. I sat staring at the picture, not able to hide my absorption in it. For I remembered that Maria had been called the most beautiful woman in the world. And I thought I remembered that her second name, almost never used and seldom heard, had been Eugenia.

And I was seeing Eugenia Bolo now in a different way than that of the eyes.

I was seeing her figure and the way she walked and moved, and remembering moving pictures I had seen of the lost, abdicated queen. I was mentally doing things with that terrible mouth—fitting teeth in it that looked as though they belonged, over which the full lips would close naturally; straightening the nose, changing it, putting those eyebrows on and a luxuriant growth of soft, fine, loose-waved hair around the face.

There remained the wrinkles, the fallen-in look. That was the thing that made her seem many years older than the dark little man whose eyes I knew, without looking at him either, were set on me in a fixed gaze that held a threat. I had let my thoughts show in my face, a thing I am seldom betrayed into. But I couldn't stop the inward study, the concentration that was engrossing me now—nothing short of a Malay kris buried in my body was going to stop me.

I was getting somewhere now. There were ways of doing all these things to a face. There's a plastic surgery that puffs up the flesh and lets it fall into folds and wrinkles when the wax melts. In this case, it would have been done on purpose—if my wild idea was right. Though why, for God's sake, would a woman—

Bolo moved suddenly behind me, and I whirled. I didn't know then, and I don't know now, what he was doing, or going to do. I only know that Eugenia stopped him.

"He knows, my dear."

She spoke on a weary kind of sigh. It was as though something too heavy to be borne, that had weighed her down for an interminable time, was slipping from her, yet as if its going meant some heavy sort of sorrow too.

"We knew the sands were running out. Is it not so, my love? What is, cannot go on forever. We must trust, if we are to seek help. Also we have promised ourselves that we would never lie to the Government of this land that has sheltered us, and he is its envoy to us."

Bolo sank back into the chair he had arisen from; a chair made of crate and box parts, unpainted, roughly nailed together. The smile was gone from his face, and his whole manner was different. It was as if a clown had laid aside his motley.

Eugenia Bolo rose from her chair and stood before me, and she held out her hand to me.

"Will you accompany me?" she said. "I will speak with you alone. I will show you the virgin forest, and what lies beyond. I will take you through the Cathedral Forest."

I THINK it came to me in that moment, that I was in danger. I little knew just what kind. These two could talk without words, however, and Bolo had certainly made me feel that he could act with violence. I was sure I was right about Eugenia. She was the lost queen. But—I think I believed she might be, perhaps, a little mad. I didn't care to go farther into the deep woods with her, and the way she spoke of them was what made me wonder about her sanity then.

That, and the things she had done to her face. I couldn't believe a sane woman would have done them. There would have been some better way to be safe, or reasonably safe; and anyway, any woman I had ever known would have preferred death to

such disfigurement. That it was voluntary, that disfigurement, I felt sure.

The sun was setting, and level, slanting golden and red rays filtered through Eugenia's "virgin forest." As the light failed and faded and blue dusk took over, I wondered how far we were going. It seemed a long way, and a senseless thing to do. After a while Eugenia took from a deep pocket in her dress a small sized dark lantern which cast so strong and yet so softly diffused a ray before us, that I had to comment on it.

"Yes," she said. "You had to see it with your own eyes, to believe what I am going to tell you—Ahmed and I. He is not really a Malay, you know, but an Arab. An Arabian scientist. I had to take you on this walk—for two reasons. You will find it hard to believe what we will tell you; but after you have *seen*—"

Her voice trailed off, and we walked again in silence. The darkness was deep, now, and the light of her lantern beam illuminated the trees and shrubs, the tracery of branches and all about us in a most incredible way.

It wasn't only that it was clear and bright. Overhead moonlight struggled intermittently down through the branches, and the golden ray from the lantern made you not notice it, or miss it when the heavy forest growth shut it off and you walked through a close-roofed tunnel of heavy leafed branches.

No, it wasn't that. I was seeing things—or almost. As though something about that light hypnotized me. I lost my uneasy feeling, though, because what I saw was all lovely. I didn't put it in my official report that I watched new buds appear and break into bloom as we approached, where at first there were only green branches; that a dead and lifeless shrub which at first held up tortured, twisted boughs, swathed itself in a tender green verdure, the color of the first shoots of early spring. Or that twice I saw small winged things flying through the air which I knew were not birds or insects. They were about the size of humming birds, perhaps; but they trailed cobwebby gauze about them that looked like tiny, flowing garments studded with stardust; and I had a swift, vanishing impression of smiling eyes and mouths set in lovely, exquisite, little faces.

Yet what I have just set down is true, even if it did not go into my report.

Suddenly Eugenia snapped off the light, and the night closed down on us, and the woods were changed.

"You have to see both sides of this," she whispered. "Have you matches? I need a light. Not the lantern, another kind of light."

I had my cigarette lighter, and I snapped it on. I had nothing to say, I felt let down and flat. I, Miles Conant, was no longer in fairyland. The dark—and something that closed down with it—had changed all that; but I had been through something I did not know about. I had been in fairyland, and I had been at home there, and now I was lonely and lost, and already ashamed of myself. How did the fakirs of India do it—the blooming shrubs out of bare branches, and all that? Hypnotism, that was it. I had been hypnotized, and by a madwoman, very likely, at that.

SHE took my lighter from me, and led me a step or two from the trail and held it so the puny flame lit up a part of the trunk of one of the tall trees.

"Look!" she said.

The word wasn't necessary. There was an ugly carving on the tree, a double carving.

Underneath, a cross—reversed. The long part uppermost, I mean. That's an age-old symbol of devil worship. And above that, there was in bas-relief the partly formed image of an ugly head. A long head with narrow eyes and cruel, back-drawn lips, and a forehead that sloped upward in two bulges: the little light, shining upward at this thing, elongated what were just the beginnings of horns.

It was a face I was never going to forget.

"Who—did that?" I managed, some double sense of sacrilege on me because of the crazy things I had been imagining about unearthly beauties and simple little miracles and the presence of tiny good elves.

"I could show you many," the woman beside me said, speaking low. "And I can tell you why they are put here. It is to

frighten me, to frighten me out of my wits —perhaps out of my life."

"But who would—*who*, as a matter of fact, would know that you walk through these woods?" I said, trying to keep things half way sane. As I said it, a rather awful thought struck me, too. One I couldn't say to her out loud. But there it was. Nobody on earth, it seemed, came here. There were no visitors. There were only this man and this woman. And if anyone did ugly little carvings on trees to drive the woman out of her mind, I thought it would have to be the man.

Maybe they were neither husband and wife, nor a lady and her servant. Maybe they were prisoner and jailer. Or—

Maybe—just a mad woman and her keeper. Maybe, it was that. She could still be the banished queen; no doubt the poor lady had had enough to make her lose her mind. In that case, perhaps she carved them herself.

I was forgetting the things I had been seeing myself, my own temporary insanity, if you like. Or maybe you can be hypnotized by a mad person as well as a sane one, and I rationalized it that way. I don't remember exactly how I figured that part of it out, because in just a moment something happened that drove it out of my mind.

We turned back toward the shack, and I closed the lighter down. There was really enough direct and indirect moonlight when you got used to depending on it, and we walked quietly back Indian style, she leading the way.

Suddenly she stopped dead in her tracks, and in a moment I knew why.

A kind of black shadow seemed pouring along the path, coming from behind us. It was exactly as if a ray of darkness were *de*luminating that pathway, if you know what I mean. The moonlight still fell brokenly from the sky through the branches, but it was darkened. You could make out the trees and leaves and things as well as before, but the darkness seemed rolling over them—a clear darkness that let you see things in an ugly, murky light.

And ahead of us in that murky light a tall figure standing suddenly directly in our way. A tall figure of a man with a long, narrow head, a high forehead branching into two hornlike elevations. Eyes that you didn't want—didn't want to see—

The golden light flashed out again, but it was dimmer now, neither very clear nor very strong, and it showed the trees and shrubs and once some sort of night bird flying. It showed us the way back to the shack, and it showed me that the figure of the man must have been all illusion, for there was nothing there. We walked right through the place where we had seen it.

WE WALKED all the way to the shack, and we climbed the rickety back steps as earlier we had the shaking front ones, and Juan Bolo—or Ahmed—stood waiting for us.

The woman threw herself into his arms. It was the first time I had seen them behave exactly like equals.

She said: "Ahmed—he has come. He, himself!"

The dark man—he was not so little now; he seemed to stand taller, and his whole face looked differently because of some change in expression—patted her on the back. He didn't know what she had told me about him, so he had one more try at the Malay, and at that horrible tittering laugh. (It was the last time I was to hear it.)

"My wife—" he said to me, "she is very superstitious. No?"

I sat down rather suddenly.

"I don't know!" I muttered. "I don't know what to think. I want to talk to you again—Mr. Bolo. But not here. I'd like to get back into the city. I would be glad to have you two come in with me. These woods seem to me a lonely place—maybe dangerous. Yet you leave your wife here alone through the daytime—"

Eugenia interrupted me, her head high.

"Sometimes at night," she said. "I assure you, I am not unarmed. I have—an arsenal!"

It didn't reassure me. An arsenal in a lonely shack in a place where even I had gone a little mad was not what I wanted. I wanted city streets, traffic, people walking along the sidewalks.

"I have some business yet tonight, anyway," I said, and it sounded pretty lame.

"You—your wife seemed to think I might be of help to you, and God knows I'm willing. But if you aren't coming in with me, I must be going, myself. We'll go into whatever there is—say tomorrow. I'll call on you at your lab, Bolo."

"You take my car," he said quietly. "Tonight I will not leave my wife."

It seemed fair enough. He gave me some keys—one was the key to the padlocked gate.

"You can give me that tomorrow—if all goes well," he said.

I saw them standing together on the little porch, the light streaming from the windows behind them. A dimmish light from the oil lamps that were all they had out there. Somehow I had a vision of beauty—briefly. Not the crazy kind I'd had in the wood, something I could understand better. Bolo's—Ahmed's arms were around her in a gesture of love and protection that was eloquent. I could feel their love, just as plainly as I could hear the call of an early cricket and see the glimmer of a late-summer firefly.

Then I looked ahead to my driving. It was only a little way to the gate, and only a few moments more till I had negotiated the awkward business of doing my duty by it—locking and unlocking and getting back to climb into the car again.

I didn't make that part of it. The most beautiful display of the whole evening was the set of sky-rockets that burst before my eyes as some blunt, heavy object came down on the back of my head.

When I awoke I could feel the earth rocking with me, and I felt as though an abyss was likely to open and swallow me up. My head was splitting and it seemed the lesion must be macrocosmic—a sundering of the universe itself. My unsteady and unfocussed gaze fell on the moon riding high in the sky. It was gibbous and waning, and I knew the night was far advanced. So I had been out, cold, for a good many hours.

I moved a little, and tried to raise my head. My muscles welcomed the relief of a shift in position, but my head rebelled, and my dizzy eyes closed, fast. I was lying on the hard floor boards of the back porch of the Bolo house—the side farthest from the road. But the boards felt all right, compared with the pain of moving my head.

My next venture was more successful. It consisted of getting my hands up to my head. At that, it wasn't too easy, because my wrists were tied pretty tightly together. So were my ankles. I was trussed like a fowl for market, in fact, and being able to lay sympathetic and inquiring fingers in a gingerly fashion against my face and the side of my head did little to reassure me. For I felt a warm, sticky wetness on my hands, and then I was compelled to open my eyes—they were steadier and clearer now—and to look at my hands as I lowered them awkwardly again. And they were the color I knew they would be. They were red.

Head wounds bleed freely, and I had seen blood before. I wasn't so worried about my physical condition. But no kind of training can steel you against the kind of terror I felt. Because of the way I was tied, like an animal—or say a man—about to be slaughtered. Yet—whoever had knocked me down and battered the side of my head could easily have finished me off at the same time. Right there on the dark road I could have been murdered, and carted away for disposal more easily dead than alive.

Therein lay the only element of hope.

This thought hit me like a shot of adrenalin, and I managed to sit up. It isn't easy with your hands tied, and doing it made me feel fairly certain that I had no concussion.

So now I could see my companions in this rustic little pavilion where I had seemed to be a welcome, although uninvited guest.

I had expected to see Juan and his caricature of a wife, but not the others. Four people sat on handmade chairs and upended boxes, watching me. Two men, and two women. Not any of them were prepossessing.

I have described Juan and Eugenia—the newcomers were more ordinary types. You could find their prototypes on a hundred isolated farms in any state, I suppose, although both of them looked foreign also. Peasant-type, I think you'd call them. And, as sometimes happens, the man was considerably slighter than the woman.

He made up for his less uncouth frame

by having a weasel-like, ill-featured narrow face lit by sharp, rodent eyes. And the unprepossessing quality of that face of his was in turn compensated by its obvious keenness, shrewdness, and intelligence. He didn't look like a man who had been taught or schooled much in any way. It was an earthy, native shrewdness that looked out of his eyes and stamped his narrow features.

The woman's face was stupidly brutal. A heavy, ignorance lay heavy on it like a cloud. Her eyes were dark and sullen, and her movements slow. But her squat, broad body would have, I thought, the strength of an ox.

Yet it was the woman who spoke.

"You screamed once," she said heavily. "We have the place beyond the wood. We know bad things of this couple and we started running, although I run not fast."

The man with the weasel face took it from there.

"They had dragged you here, Mister, and tied you like that. They have prevented our doing anything for you, because they carry guns. My wife picked up a cleaver we use in butchering a few hogs which we raise, but we have no other weapons. We are ordinary plain people, and farmers, and have not wanted dealings with this man and woman."

Naturally, I looked to Juan, and to his wife. I had not thought badly of them; as I left them I had seen in them something I thought was rare and beautiful.

I looked at them, where they sat side by side in the shadow. And they did not speak at all, and it was true that Juan held across his knees a very efficient looking rifle.

So I thought I'd make the woman talk, Eugenia— She had been the spokesman for them both; she had to say something for herself now. At least she had to explain.

"Mrs.—" I began, and I saw her lean toward me with the easy grace that was hers.

But the woman from the farm beyond the wood cried out sharply and roughly, and cut her off.

"Do not speak to her and do not listen. The woman is a *witch!*" was what she said.

Well! I had not been prepared for that.

I became aware of cross currents of passionate feeling in the room. Some of them were my own. I was bewildered, shocked. I had been near to "going all out" for this strange couple in their hideaway in the deep woods.

Now I was nauseated, weak and ill, and in these last few moments feeling myself grow worse rather than better. There was the necessity for a decision, and I wasn't up to it. Some of these people were responsible for the blow that might have killed me, and probably was intended to do exactly that. Since Eugenia and Bolo were armed, and these others were accusing them, appearances indicated that Bolo and Eugenia were not a mysterious, glamorous pair of outcasts, but that they were criminals.

But that crack about Eugenia being a witch was too much for me, and it was natural for me to line up against anyone who made a crazy accusation like that.

The ferret-faced farmer may have read my thoughts in my face.

"Mister—" he began again, speaking easily and suavely, "my wife, she believes in the witchcraft. You, I can see, do not. Only those who come from the isolated, backward countries hold such a belief in these times.

"But perhaps there is another way of saying what my wife has tried to tell you. This woman whose husband, has tried to kill you, sir, is of those who can create strange fancies in the mind. Even in America, that is known, is it not? Once I attended a playhouse where illusions were created on the stage. They were only meant to amuse— but I have heard of cases where such things are done for harm. There was an old mansion set in wide fields in Pennsylvania, where I once was, which was believed to be haunted. Actually, a woman who lived there all alone was driven mad.

"Ghostly apparitions, they called the things she saw, and they used other big words. It was found that these things were done by an heir next in line, who wished to inherit. He was punished with a prison term."

Well. Like it or not, this talk made more sense. Yet I didn't get the connection. Why would a couple who wanted to kill me because, perhaps, I was in danger of learning

something about them which they wanted left hidden, play witch tricks on the simple farmer folk who were their not-very-near neighbors?

AGAIN the yokel seemed to read my mind.

"The truth is, Sir," he said, "that we are all from the same far country. From East Sylvania, where even today the common people believe in vampires and werewolves, in wizards and witches. This woman was our most unworthy queen, and she was driven out because it was believed she practiced sorcery with the aid of the man—who is an Arab of much strange knowledge.

"We—my wife, Matthe and I—came to this land only to share in its great richness. Learning by chance that Queen Eugenia was plotting against it, we have followed her and the Arab here. We have waited and watched, intending to act only if the time came.

"The time, Mister—Sir—is here. We were able to save you from the Arab's attack. It was my running up which prevented him from better aiming the blow which was to kill you, Sir. Our presence has saved you; and we are ready to testify against these two. My name is Ivor Wolfert, and I, and Matthe, are at your service."

My head was throbbing madly, and my tongue felt thick—not a good sign. It was no time to lose consciousness again. If Ivor's story was true, the guns were in the wrong hands, and how could he say he had saved me, and how could he expect to live to testify? "What is wrong with this picture?" I thought; and couldn't answer myself. Things were all out of focus.

I made a violent effort to come by something resembling logic and reason.

"If they are as bad as all that, why don't they shoot the three of us—and set fire to your house, after taking our bodies there?" I asked, feeling a little bit like the parent who told the boy not to put peas in his nose—and something like it, was a logical idea for a pair of international murderers and plotters, whether they were sorcerers or not.

That sorcery thing still stuck in my throat. I was weak, ill and dizzy, and my mind had reverted instinctively to the first principles I had learned in my business as an investigator. When anyone tells too tall a tale, that person is the most likely one to suspect.

And another thing. Find out the end of the "tall tale." The end of the story. The objective.

The story against Bolo and Eugenia didn't ring true, because they could have thought of what I had just suggested, and they could have done it, but they hadn't. Now if I went along with the Wolfert family—

"What do you think I ought to do?" I asked, fuzzily, when no one answered that last little question I had put.

It was the woman Matthe who answered. Heavily she leaned her awkward body toward me. An evil light glittered in the little eyes that were too small for the big-boned face.

"The gun covers my husband, Sir!" she said. "Before I move fast, it will be pointed at me, perhaps. But all three of us it cannot control. You and I must leap upon the Arab. Two of us will live to beat the man to death!"

Her bloodthirstiness settled down in my mind with that charge of witchcraft. I didn't like her!

"It will probably be your husband who will be killed!" I reminded. "So far as you are concerned, he's Bolo's hostage."

"If it must be, it must." The woman's voice was a low mutter; her little eyes still glared into mine venomously. "A life is not too great a price, to kill a witch. And the woman must die also!"

"No. You'd have to promise no violence! No one to be murdered, neither queen nor Arab nor witch. No one, do you hear? And if you promised, I wouldn't believe you!"

I WAS shouting, and my shouting sounded just a little hysterical. I slumped down on top of the wooden-board table, propping myself on my two arms. I could feel a longish lock of hair dangle on my forehead, which happens when I am mussed up and bothered, giving me a rather juvenile look. I could feel something else slide across the skin of my brow and cheek

also—I had started the blood flowing again in my head wound.

Eugenia saw this. I looked at her just then, at the ugly, out-of-proportion face with those eyes I had had to like. I saw something shine out of those eyes that I had seen in the eyes of other women, when that lock of hair fell down. A shining tenderness—

She put down her artillery and rose, holding the queer lantern with which we had walked through her beautiful "virgin forest" a short while ago. All this time its beam had been directed into the far corner of the porch, where the house wall made a dark ell with the rickety little tacked on clapboard kitchen.

She came close to me—very close, her eyes looking into mine with that look which belonged on the face of a mother looking at a hurt child. She held the lantern high, so that it shone directly on my pounding, bleeding head. It also illumined her face, in all its lumpy, fallen-in and bulged-out contours, making nutty shadows of the heavy wrinkles.

Behind me, the woman Matthe screamed in a strange, guttural croak.

"That's how she can bewitch—you will see strange things, until your mind goes and you are quite mad!" she cried.

The pain in my head abated, and I could think.

I was remembering. The path in the forest. The lovely, illusory things I had seen, walking in the golden glow from the little lantern.

You could long for such a moment's seeing, all through a lifetime. You could remember—as one who loves the sea remembers it living out a long life on a bleak prairie; as one who loves the changing mystery of stars and moon and sunrises and sunsets might remember, shut away for a lifetime in some prison-tomb.

With an ugly sequence of thought like the jangle of a broken harpstring in the middle of a symphony, I remembered something else, too. I remembered the horror that had suddenly followed the brighter vision, the dreadful demonic figure that froze my blood on the way back from that forest walk. If Eugenia had summoned that phantom also—whether by hypnosis, lantern slide or any formula of psychology and/or physics, then Eugenia was dreadfully, potently, unbelievably evil.

I drew back a little, staring at her.

My breath drove out of me in a forced expulsion that might have been caused by a physical blow. I stared at her face.

The lines and furrows were gone from it, in some trick of that lantern's light, in some shift of position which showed no shadow at all. The scarified look was gone, the fullness where it didn't belong, the hard, gaunt lines. The nose was perfect and flawless, the teeth neat and small and pearly, the slightly parted lips like red flower petals. So had Queen Eugenia looked before accident or her wish had disfigured her. So had the queen looked in the royal pictures I had seen, and so did she still look in the silver-framed photograph inside the shack. So did she look—

So did she *not* look. For with an unsteady hand that recognized more plainly than the look of realization in her eyes, my sudden vision of her, she hastily lowered the lantern. It dangled from her hand, grown suddenly slack and purposeless; and in the light of the oil lamp set on a shelf built for it, the old, tired, marred face looked at me sadly.

I SHOOK my head and shut my eyes and rubbed them. And it was then a shot rang out, and for a moment I stared wildly about me, seeing a confusion of struggling figures before I realized the change in the balance of power there on that embattled, rickety little back porch.

Wolfert had snatched the lantern from Eugenia, and dashed it to the floor, where it lay shattered. Bolo had fired the shot, but Matthe had flung herself upon him—probably just before Wolfert leaped. The gun lay on the floor at my feet, and I picked it up.

It came to me, then, that my head did not bother me at all. I don't think I made the connection immediately. It seemed natural and right not to be weak, sick and giddy, not to have blood flowing, to be in charge of the situation. After all, it was my business to be in charge.

"You are all under arrest," I said, and I said it very clearly, and with a satisfaction that was almost violent in its intensity. It was about time! A Government man is not supposed to spend hour after hour delving in the field of optical illusions, discussing shady characters with each other, trying to decide which way to cast his vote in order not to become a dead Government man while the shady characters go gaily on their various mysterious ways. At last, I had the situation in hand, and I wasn't going to let it slip again.

"You may all line up against the wall," I continued. "I'm going to search you for concealed weapons, and then you can walk single file into the kitchen lean-to, which has a door with a lock and only the cracks in the boards and the chimney for ventilation. There you'll stay until I can get to a phone and back here."

It seemed simple. Let them all tell their stories, their crazy, inconsistent stories, to the Investigation Committee. I had seen more than enough to warrant holding every one of them. For attempted murder, anyhow; and which of them was attempting the murder, and what they had been up to that made them attempt it, might presently appear. So far as I was concerned, it would be a pleasure to think of them all safe in jail for a while.

They moved back to the wall, exactly as I told them and motioned them to do. And it was not until then that I noticed I had an extra captive. There should have been four. But there were five.

He stood in the middle of a circle of dark light. I don't know how to describe it better; Milton wrote of "not light, but rather darkness visible." I'm not given to quoting the classics audibly or inaudibly, but my mind framed the words again.

The source of this livid green-blue-dirty purple light-cone—for it was a cone that narrowed rapidly down to a point—was not a lantern such as Eugenia had played her pretty games with, but a small, streamlined and normal appearing flashlight of the lead pencil variety. I found it by following the light back to its source. Someone had laid it down on a stool so that its light fell into that corner Eugenia had kept the direct shine from her lantern turned into. Maybe the sulphurish light, the queer, darkish light, couldn't show so long as the other light was on it—just as white light is made up of all the various colored rays, maybe these two neutralized each other.

When I thought that, I was on the way to understanding a good many things. But consciously, my thoughts and my feelings were petrified and paralyzed, when I looked back, after tracing the source of the light, at *Him*.

He was the demon-looking character who had frightened me out of my wits out there in the forest. The same, with a difference.

In the forest, he had been a colossus. Something to come between you and the whole world, too big and dreadful to escape —yet somehow—I knew it now, looking back at it—he had been *tenuous*. Not altogether solid, even in all that clarity of vision. Something we had seemed to *pass through*, finally. We went right through where he had been, or seemed to be, or projected that huge image of himself, anyway.

This man I was looking at was life size, and no more; a little bigger than me—and I'm not a small man—but only a little. He was, however, very static, very solid, very much there to be reckoned with. And I had him standing there against the wall—but not because I had ordered *him* there. Oh, no! He had been standing there looking coolly at me, before I saw him. I knew that.

I guess Wolfert and his wife Matthe became aware of him by the look in my eyes. You do stare at a person who is gesturing you around with a loaded gun. They lost interest in the gun and swung round to face the Newcomer, and the intensity of their adoration lent them an incredible grace as they sank to their knees, facing him.

"Master!" I heard Matthe breathe.

He faced me across their kneeling forms, with a leering suavity impossible to describe. I still found nothing better to do than to stare at him.

He wore no hat, and his black hair receded in those two peaks from his dark brows, as suggestive as ever of horns. Small, concrete horns, not sweeping up into the

shadows; but incredibly wicked looking. Cruel, they looked; as though they could actually be used to butt with, as a goat or a bull butts. His mouth was cynical, and turned down at the corners. He wore unrelieved black; no white shirt front such as the gentleman Dracula affects in the movies; he was buttoned up in black to his chin. From his shoulders swept a voluminous black cape, or cloak; and you may believe this or not—I didn't want to at the time—but bats literally clung to him, to the folds of that great flowing garment. They clung, and crawled on it, and took little flights in circles that brought them right back to him, making little squeaking noises of delight.

"*Why*—I wonder, have artists and other speculative souls always known of the affinity between devils and bats?"

He said the words slowly, quizzically, as though we had all the time there was; as though there was no time to be considered. *As though there was no time*—

I remembered that talk of madness. I checked my thoughts. For a moment, I had fancied myself living in some other plane, or dimension, or state—I believe that I had thought myself in Hell.

STRANGELY, it was the thought of poor Eugenia that braced me. *She* had known of this. She hadn't produced an illusion in the forest, she had been terrified too, not shamming, it was a fear she knew and lived with—and *fought*.

The abdicated queen of a little country that believed in things like this—could fight it. A queen could fight it—a woman could fight—

A man had to fight it. *I* had to.

I made one last stab at authority. At least it was a gesture—it was a *sane* thing to do. It was an act of faith, an assumption that there was anything *anyone* could do.

"I wish you would tell me—what you want to accomplish here," I said, addressing *him*. "I have a loaded gun in my hands, and I can use it if—if it is necessary. On the other hand, it may be that I have no quarrel with you at all. You haven't interfered with my prisoners, although two of them—"

I broke off. I had made my gesture, I had asked him—what he wanted. Maybe, I thought, he wanted to take his two worshipful followers away with him. Well, I thought I would let him. Maybe he wanted Eugenia and Bolo. I wouldn't let him have them, without trying what a bullet would do. It was silly, but I wasn't sure a bullet would do very much—against *him*. Still, I would try; if I had to.

Maybe he wanted something else, something that didn't matter to me as an agent of the Government, or as a man either. I could hope—

And he could answer.

"The Queen's lantern is broken," he said with a strange irrelevance. "I want *it*. All you have to do, my friend, is to keep these two—Queen Eugenia and her consort—from interfering. The three of us will go away peacefully to the farmhouse in the adjoining field beyond the wood, taking the broken lantern with us. You may go back to town. You may take this couple with you, or leave them—it does not matter. If you are not satisfied as to Ivor and Matthe, send for them later. They will not be leaving the farmhouse."

My relief was like feeling a mountain move off your chest, in a nightmare.

The man Ivor and the woman Matthe were not kneeling now. They leaned forward in an odd crouching posture. They were ready to snatch the lantern. Theirs was an avidity not altogether human; the man resembled a wolf crouching to spring, the woman was like nothing as much as a vulture.

They were too eager, and too ugly.

I hesitated, where I had intended to agree hastily. I returned to involved improbable conjecturings, though I was sick of them.

"I'll hear why you want the lantern," I said, doggedly, feeling that I was shutting the door that might have let me out of this fantastic nightmare.

"Tell me what you think it will do for you. Tell me what it *is!*"

"You Americans are so practical," *He* sneered. "You understand a lantern, Mr. Conant. Metal and glass, and something to make a light. A kind of—battery, an electric filament, shall we say?"

Queen Eugenia of East Sylvania came

slowly, haltingly and laid her hand upon my arm. It was a graceful, slender hand, like her body which moved so fluently. Nothing had been done to disfigure her hands, I hadn't noticed them before.

"Let Juan—let Ahmed tell you. And believe him—"

Her voice died. The man who was not a Malay, but an Arabian, not a misplaced houseboy, but a scientist, not an oriental half of a common mixed race marriage, but the banished scientist who had married his exiled queen to protect her—this man from whose face the foolish grin had vanished, whose shoulders were squared back so that the straightness of his spine added something to his stature—stood close to us, and somehow we three become undeclared allies in something dreadfully important, maybe more important than life.

"There is so little time," he said in a falling intonation of sorrow. "Little time for any of us here, perhaps, perhaps for the whole world. You will believe, or you will not, Mr. Conant. But the source of light in that lantern—only obscured, only lacking the focus of a broken lens—is actually something like the Philosopher's Stone. You are familiar with the old quest, the ancient alchemical theory and research of legend and fact?"

"They wanted to turn base metals into gold. It could never be done," I said stupidly.

"It was—in part—a concealed symbol," the Arab said quietly. "Base metals into gold, base creatures into noble, all that involve the transmutation into gold as well. By changing the *atoms*—not fission, the source of high explosives, potentially of power and energy. By changing things without destroying them. By transmutation!"

"This man—" Eugenia's voice was proud, but it was not the pride of wife for husband, so much as the gracious pride of a queen bestowing a knightly honor. "This man worked in a secret laboratory—endlessly, tirelessly, heroically without despair or giving up. He—Ahmed, son of a long and ancient line of Arabian scientists. He worked with the new forces, the new knowledge. He made possible the old dream that was impossible before the new knowledge. He built the Philosopher's Stone. Combined powers of electricity and magnetism forged it. And then—the powers of evil rose in fury, as they have always done. The kingdom was destroyed. I, who protected Ahmed, was forced to abdicate. He came with me, loyal to me, and we two have hidden our secret. But the other half of the Stone, *they* took."

"The other half—?"

"The other side of the shield. The obverse. The dark side. For Ahmed himself had been compelled to forge it, when he learned the truth—that only combined with the binder of an opposite and nearly equal force, are permanence and stability added to the light which reveals, but has by itself no material substance. There are thought forms. There are forms of light and of darkness. Light and matter have a common quotient; but to weld them into one, the vibratory forces which oppose them must be present also. Present in a balance finely determined; a proportion exhaustively analyzed, made a little less in potency, but present as God has balanced the forces that support the stars and planets."

I look back, wondering at myself; and a little proud.

Because I understood him, and I believed him. It must be that when you hear an absolute truth, you recognize it; however little you've thought the thoughts which could prepare you for it, you know, and you say to yourself that you know. And you behave accordingly. Like a man to whom it has been given to understand.

"The other light, the dark one. The one *he* is standing in, that comes from the little flashlight there. *That* was the one that showed horrible things in the forest. And they couldn't be solid and real, because—that is the other half of the stone, the obverse. Neither one is much good without the other. And *he* has the half that makes things that are evil appear."

I was thinking aloud, as much as answering Ahmed, but his eyes lit up, and then he and Eugenia exchanged a look which flashed the most utter triumph.

"He knows. He is on our side, now," Ahmed said; and she breathed a sigh of relief, and pressed my hand.

Yes, I was on their side. But—

"What is it you want me to do?" I asked her. "And—what can *he* do? I can keep Wolfert and his wife quiet with my gun. But if *he*—used force, would—would my bullets stop him?"

I COULD feel the fury, the cold hate, pouring at me from the dark-clad figure standing in the circle of lurid light. I could imagine those long arms leaping at me, the dark cloak with its horror of clinging bats enfolding, smothering me.

"His force is what he is using. He must act through other hands," Ahmed told me. "If he can possess our lantern, or rather what is in it; if he can secure the good half of the Philosopher's Stone, through the physical means of Wolfert and Matthe; then he will be able to materialize.

"No one—least of all I—know all the things the Philosopher's Stone can do. If the good preponderates, all things exposed to its emanations will come into better vibrations, higher forms of being. The sick will be healed—your wound was healed just now because of the temporary power of the unbalanced Stone, for it was only a surface wound. The true Stone would cure much worse deviations from what is sound and whole. But, you see the converse is true also. If he can possess our half of the Stone, and unite it with that which he has—making the adjustment so that the evil is the stronger—then the emanations of the thing will be evil, and what evil can manifest itself only as a phantasy and a powerful mental force, will be able to incarnate itself as well.

"*He* will incarnate himself."

As it stood, then, he was powerless. Only through others could he act; and if he was trying to force his way into my mind, he was not succeeding.

For I hated him, and I meant to see that Eugenia and Ahmed had their way with the dark light, with the thing in the little flashlight that made it shine.

"I'll hold Wolfert and Matthe with my gun. I'll shoot if I must," I promised. "Take the flashlight, and get out the other half of your Stone. It's yours. You made the two halves, didn't you? Both of them. So you know how to put them together, and in the right proportion. Can you do it here?"

"It will have to be!" Ahmed said promptly. There was something in his voice that made me wonder. Regret. Or fear. But he walked across the little shake-down porch, and lifted the flashlight.

I half expected Wolfert and Matthe to try to stop him. I was ready for it. The butt of the gun would do, I thought.

And I thought that I mustn't look into that dark corner from which the light had vanished. Ahmed had put it out, by the simple expedient of pressing his thumb on the button. And yet, I didn't want to look into that corner. It would be empty, now, in the pale, white light from the hurricane lantern hung from a hook. But there would be *Something* there—a malignancy. I didn't want to confront it.

"We will have to hurry." Ahmed's voice now was all urgency.

"The Dark One is still there, although invisible. He will try to create confusion in your mind, my friend. You are strong in part because of the light that healed your wound. It made you very open to perceptions of truth. But that part may fade, and we must hurry now."

He busied himself with the flash. Something slid out of it into the palm of his hand, and he winced as he held it closed under his fingers.

"The touch is not pleasant," he said.

EUGENIA had been working over the little lantern, where it lay smashed on the floor. She also had taken out a small object, and this also she held so that I could not see. Only, through Ahmed's locked fingers trickled small broken rays of the greenish light; and through Eugenia's, a rosy gleam, which made her flesh appear translucent and daintily veined.

They turned from me, then, and I saw that they meant to walk away from the house, out into the leaf-roofed night.

"There is some danger," Ahmed said, turning back to speak to me when they had descended the steps. "This should be done in a laboratory, under very exact conditions.

"You see, the Stone must unite its two

halves, previously forged, at an exact temperature. This temperature, strangely enough, is about that of the normal human body; I think the Stone when it is united becomes actually a living thing, perhaps a sort of link between the inorganic and the organic world.

"It will not unite firmly, unless the two halves are—as now—equal. After the union is made, very carefully, the evil half must be chipped away. Lessened a very little bit; so that the good will predominate, without appreciable loss of any element. This balance, as I think I've said, is as delicate as the balance of the Universe itself.

"But—even over-excitement, even a slightly raised temperature in Eugenia or in myself; these might cause fusion to take place violently. Hence, the danger.

"Of course—if one of us is cold; if we were to feel, one or both of us, that deadly fear which causes subnormality—than the fusion might not take place at all.

"We can only try, Mr. Conant. But—if the first unfortunate circumstance should develop; if Eugenia and I should both receive a shock comparable to a strong shock of electricity. Then, Mr. Conant, I confide to you what may be the last hope of the world.

"You would find the stone lying where it had fallen, Mr. Conant. And you would take the risk of carefully chipping from it a very small sliver or particle of the dark side of that stone.

"It is strange, is it not? The obverse of the coin, the constant balance of forces and discoveries?

"Fission of the atom, and its potential power to destroy every living thing and the planet itself. And in the same period of time, the fusion of the proper elements into what may become the magic stone of the ancients, potent to transmute that which is evil into that which is good!"

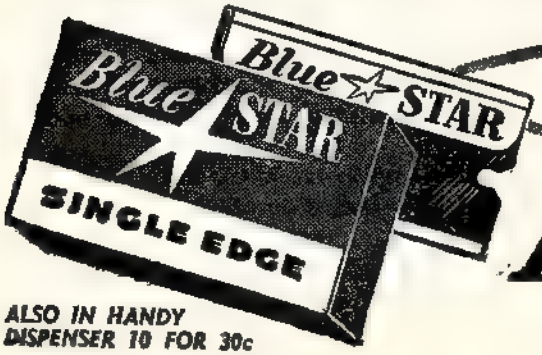
I felt a sudden burning desire to help, in some way, to be a part of the danger, to share in the glory. I took a step forward—

"Please stay where you are, Mr. Conant!" Ahmed said, sharply.

A Dollar's Worth of Shaving Pleasure *for a Dime!*

Smoother, easier, faster shaves every time because Blue Star Blades are ground and honed in oil

Try a Blue Star Blade on hard-to-shave spots. See how much shaving pleasure it gives you for so little money. Shave and save with Blue Star today.



ONLY 10¢ A PACKAGE

ALSO IN HANDY DISPENSER 10 FOR 30c

Blue STAR

SINGLE EDGE RAZOR BLADES

PRECISION ASR PRODUCTS

AMERICAN SAFETY RAZOR CORP., BROOKLYN 1, N. Y.

HE AND Eugenia walked a little way down the path, to where stood the well from which—she had told me—they drew all their water. It seemed to me very strange that they paused beside the well. The moon threw a broken shaft of light on them, and on the well, a beautiful old-fashioned well with some kind of trailing vine grown up over it.

I saw the silver flash of moonlight as Ahmed drew up the dripping bucket, using the hand that was free. He tilted the bucket carefully into a tin cup there on the flat coping, and lifted the cup to Eugenia's lips. She drank from it, and then he drank, and then he poured out the water on the ground.

The moonlight made a cascade of light of the arc of water as it fell. It was like drinking a toast, and drinking it in moonlight.

The man and woman standing there turned to face each other, then, and they joined hands there in the moonlight. They joined hands, but it was not exactly that: they held out each a hand to the other, and it was the hands holding the two halves of the Philosopher's Stone that met so, and the two halves were held to each other so —and pressed firmly together. I could see their figures show the tension. I could feel the tension in the very air, in the whole big night. Like a powerful magnetic force, a big current of electricity, and the funny smell of ozone.

Two awkward scrambling forms dashed past me.

I had forgotten Wolfert and Matthe, and they were hurling themselves down there. I knew what they intended. To snatch the stone the minute it had fused together, to beat down the frailer woman and the man who was rapt in the moment, in the thing he was doing there. They would murder Ahmed and Eugenia both, to get that stone. But until Ahmed and Eugenia's hands fell apart, and one of them held the fused, united stone—they would wait that long.

I started down the steps. If they started something, I must be there. I wouldn't be able to shoot, whatever they did, because of the danger of hitting Ahmed and Eugenia, who were beyond them.

I started down the steps, but I didn't make the bottom step before it happened.

A column of flame shot from earth to heaven. Silent, swift, it came and was gone.

But—Ahmed and Eugenia were a part of that flame. For a split instant they *were* flame. Then—they were not.

Wolfert and Matthe were there. They were lying face down on the ground, fallen as they were still running, leaping forward. And they were dead.

I spent hours in that spot. I don't know how many hours.

Did I find the Philosopher's Stone?

I don't know. Or yes, I'd rather say I didn't, but of course I did.

There was this stone. It wasn't luminous, any more. There were queer things about it, yes.

One side was light, and the other side was dark. It reminded me, somehow, of the moon, Earth's eternal, inscrutable partner in space. One side visible, and one side never glimpsed at all. Because that was how this stone struck me.

It was about two inches in diameter, and round—flattened at the poles, I started to say. I found it strangely planet-like. Strangely *living*, too. The flame, that soaring column of fire and light and silence, hadn't left things hot, or burned around there, and the round stone was neither hot nor cold. It was just about the temperature of a man's hand. Not my hand, I could feel the fever of too much excitement and nerve strain burning in me. So to me it had the slightly cooler touch of a normal person's hand when you have a fever. Poor Eugenia had looked burning, flaming with hope and excitement, when she had walked out there into the moonlit night with Ahmed. I realize now, that she, at least, must have been much too far off the norm to achieve that impossible laboratory exactitude of normal temperature Ahmed had said was needed for safety.

So it was up to me to carefully chip away a bit of the dark side of this stone.

I STUDIED it. It was the *strangest* blackness, or darkness. Darkness visible. Once more I had to recreate that phrase. Looking at it was like looking into a soft nothingness that had a hypnotic effect. It

set me to dreaming, as a psychoanalyst sets a patient off by having him look at something bright. Only this was the reverse of bright; the *obverse,* Ahmed would have said. Yet it drowned your gaze, lost you in a soft, dark dream.

By and by I began to wonder why I had assumed that the dark side was the evil side, and the bright one—the light one, with just the look of the inside of a seashell, was the one that was powerful for good. Ahmed had implied that—I guessed. Maybe even Ahmed didn't know how it would seem, once it was fused.

Then I began to wonder what would happen to me, if I handled it roughly.

Or how anyone could know just how much of it ought to be chipped or slivered away.

And finally, I began to wonder how any of it could be true.

I had two dead people on my hands, dead of a sort of shock, probably electrical in nature, which seemed actually to have annihilated the physical bodies of Eugenia, once queen of East Sylvania, and Ahmed, her scientific protegee against whom the people of East Sylvania had risen.

I had in my hands a stone which—perhaps—had chemical properties they had loosed in putting the two halves of it, with varying and unknown chemical compositions, together.

Maybe a slip in handling the thing would cause more destruction, a lot of it. Not merely myself; there's that chain reaction they talk about in connection with the atom bomb. There's radioactivity, and a lot of other things I know even less about.

It seemed like a miracle, the way things around that spot were unharmed: except for poor, unattfactive Wolfert and his wife, who were dead, and the two who were gone. The organisms of men and animals are different from other things.

Anyway, miracle or not, the pretty sylvan well was as before, silent and lovely in the moonlight.

I tossed the strange little stone into the well. I heard it splash. I thought: Who was it that went looking for truth at the bottom of a well?

And I thought I heard Someone laugh. An ugly, sardonic laugh, that mixed itself up with little squeaking noises.

The noises were bats. The night was full of them.

It would be hard to get a stone, just one little round stone, out of the bottom of a deep well, wouldn't it? No man in his senses would undertake a job like that. Of course, *he* didn't get *his* way either—whichever one of the various demons escaped from their own place *he* was.

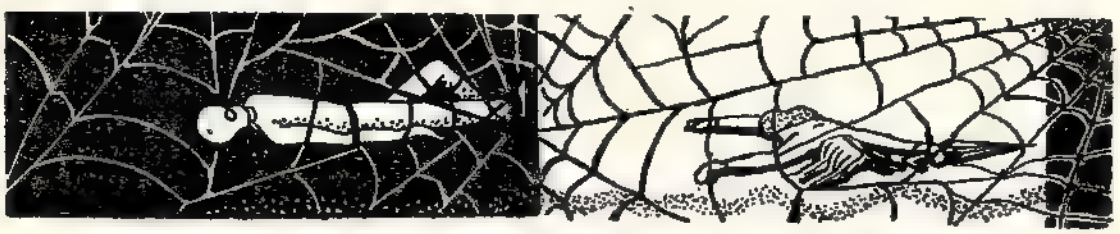
But the thing I wake up at night over is this.

He may find another pair of hands to serve *him,* someday; a pair of hands belonging to a stupid clod of a person just foolish enough to do a stupid thing like that. Drain a well in the deep forest, and grub out a rather ordinary looking round stone, and chip away just a little of the *light* side—

And if that happens, fission or fusion, it won't matter much. If the world isn't blown up, it will change, and not in a good way. What is bad could be so incredibly worse, and what is good could be so incredibly destroyed.

And yet—the man who caused all that would be powerful. More powerful than Nero or Caligula.

I wish I had never seen the dark form in the shadows.



Ghostly music sounded from the very walls of the old house. . . .

The Brides Of Baxter Creek

by C. J. Barr

Reading by Joseph Eberle

I

SANG GEORGE:

"Oh, I am painting the lean-to
Which I certainly didn't mean to!"

and he splashed the white paint, merrily up and down the trim of the old house. George was a cheerful, forthright young man with no inhibitions whatsoever and with no claim to being artistic. That department was his wife's. Nell, it was, who had determined they should take over the little tumbledown house instead of living in one of the assembly line "homes" of the new nearby suburban developments. George, always good natured, had agreed and now spent such week-ends as he was home—he traveled for a much advertised line of soapflakes—in tinkering and plastering, shoring up or painting—in fact in any sort of project for which Nell enlisted his help. He was very much in love.

Nell was, too. In love with her husband, and now in love, desperately and deeply, with her house. It was in one of those old New York villages which had escaped being entirely engulfed by the waves of glass-sided, picture-windowed, characterless abodes which spread out from every town. They had bought it in spite of her family's objections that she'd be lonely there, George being away so much and the neighbors being mostly local people, resentful or suspicious of city folks—especially those with ideas about doing over old houses. But Nell had persisted and they were happily established in the place with its weathered shingles, sagging window frames, overgrown garden and undeniable charm. They hadn't much furniture, but what they had was good and suitable or else good and with possibilities of refurberation. At which Nell was a good hand; she loved to scrape paint, solder joints, wax wood and paper walls. She found life so good, so complete, so satisfying—or had up till the last two weeks.

George had been away the entire time and except for the once-a-week cleaning woman—a dear but erratic—and an occasional call from a neighbor—they were very friendly after all—Nell had been alone in the house. Or had she. . . .? Young Mrs. Howard was almost beginning to wonder.

And this very day it was George who added one more doubt in her mind. "Hey, Nell," he called backing down the ladder for more paint, "you been doing any of this?"

"No," said Nell who was ready to try most anything, "the ladder was too heavy to lift." And she sauntered over to see him looking down at undeniable marks in the flower bed along the front of the house lean-to—marks such as would be left by a ladder placed against the side. Moreover, there were footprints there, too, a woman's footprints. Only made by very high heels, which Nell never indulged in.

"Must ha' been a ghost," said George lightly—but a chill came over his young wife at the words.

Since they had moved to Baxter Creek she had learned quite a bit about the history of their old house. It had been the former manse; the church site was now only indicated by a half-filled cellar hole in the overgrown lot on the side road beside the house. The last minister of the district had had his study in the lean-to room, the roof of which came well up to the eaves of the larger part of the house. Some tragedy seemed to have

overtaken the Reverend Mr. Baxter—his family was the one for which originally the place had been named—for his wife had met an accident in the house itself, an accident that had caused her death while still a young woman.

Nell's informant was rather vague as to the actual tragedy—she herself was a child at the time—but she thought the minister's wife had fallen against the iron balustrade of the stair, cut herself and bled to death in her husband's absence. Nell found her grave in the desolate neglected graveyard back of the old church site. It was overgrown with brambles and tangled vines, but, her hands encased in stout gloves, Nell scraped these aside and managed to make out the legend on the tombstone:

HORTENSE BAXTER
Wife of the Reverend Hosea Baxter
Departed this life May 18, 18—

A false step caused her death

After her passing the clergyman over the years had become more and more of a recluse, the nature of the community changed, people moved to the cities and finally the church was closed. What eventually became of the Reverend Mr. Baxter himself Nell couldn't learn, but he had certainly disappeared from the scene. The house became more and more unfortunate in its tenants, and had been empty for several years when Nell and George Howard took it over with such enthusiasm. It was a lovely little structure of weathered wood without and white woodwork within, and consisted of a hallway and staircase, a parlor off the hall from which opened the lean-to room—the Howards, too, called it the study, although so far they had hardly sat down there since moving into the house—or anywhere else, for that matter, there was so much to be done.

Back of the parlor was a sort of alcove dining space and behind that across the whole back of the house was a kitchen big enough to use for everything if there hadn't been another room in the house. Upstairs were two bedrooms, several wooden cupboards and a minute bathroom—added not so long ago by the looks of things. The wall which abutted the attic space above the lean-to was wholly blank—Nell had designs on it for eventual decoration.

At the time no more was said about the footprints in the flower bed, but Nell was vaguely uneasy about their presence. Frequently of late she had had a feeling that someone else was with her in the Baxter Creek house. George and she spent a lovely busy, happy week-end there then he departed on the sudsy trail leaving Nell with the returning birds—and a newly acquired puppy of uncertain parentage, but enchanting manners, named Breezy.

The first night George was away Nell was awakened by the whimpering of the puppy, and the whole house seemed alive and filled with the swelling sound of organ music. Suddenly she was conscious of the theme. "... *Here comes the bride,*" sounded the notes, "*here comes the bride . . . .*" The threnody died away, there came a sort of black stillness over the place, even the wind outside died down. Nell lay listening, puzzled, amazed and strangely awed, while a trembling puppy crawled up the stairs and begged to be taken into bed. It was against the principles she and George had laid down, but the little animal was so bewildered that Nell lifted him onto the covers. She found his presence quite comforting, and they finally both went to sleep.

The next day Nell's brother, his wife and children spent at Baxter Creek. They admired the old house, the pleasant street, sympathized with the fact that Breezy seemed to be so cowed and abject, prophesying that he would overcome his tremors, however. In their company Nell felt so relaxed and happy that she went to bed quite at ease.

Sometime after midnight she was awakened once more by the sound of organ music which seemed to emanate from the very walls of the house. "... *Here comes the bride*", pulsed the notes, and Nell could have sworn she heard footsteps on the creaking old stairs.

Amazed, yet not wholly terrified—after all, she was a modern young woman—Nell lay still and listened. *Were* there footsteps on the stairs? Well, perhaps, but most assuredly the whole house was ringing with the ghostly sound of the wedding march. Then came that deathly silence Nell had experienced before, preceded by a sound of sobbing. And once more a whimpering small dog appeared at her bedside.

"Well!" said Nell aloud to herself. "Here I am living in a haunted house. What do I do next?"

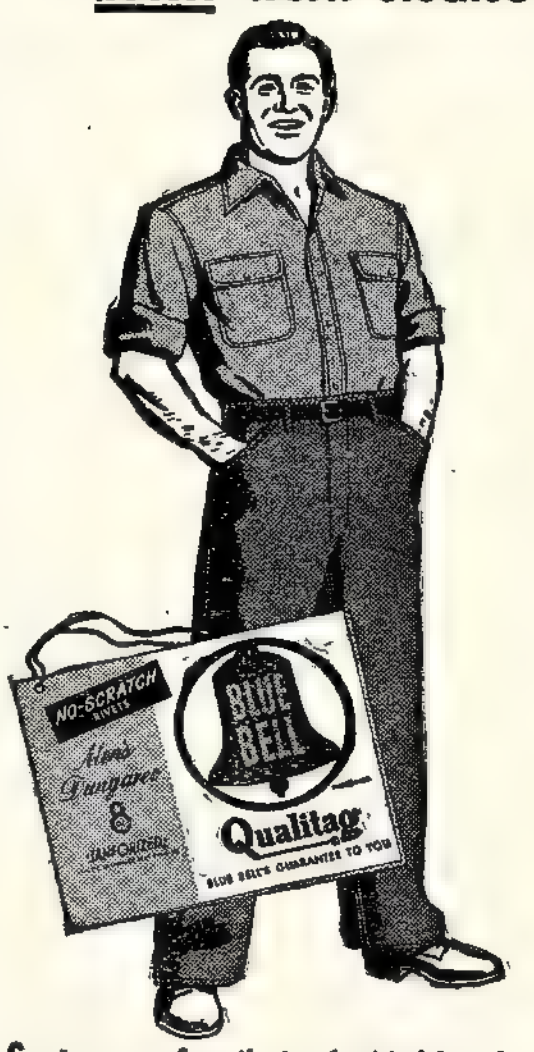
II

ONE thing she did was to visit the nearby county town with its local Historical Society, and read up on the life which had centered about the vanished Baxter Creek church and its eccentric minister. She was in luck in that when the church had been abandoned the records had been transferred to the Society archives and Nell found copious day to day notes of her neighborhood. There was a pretty complete history of the Baxter family, which had figured in witchcraft trials in the old days, she discovered, but later on seemed decent enough folk—whose line apparently ended with the disappearance of the Reverend Hosea Baxter.

His wife had been from another State and little record remained of her save some mention of her accomplished organ playing and her signature as witness at many, many weddings. Her husband seemed to have been a marrying parson, indeed, and have married countless couples at his house rather than in the church—which she found described as "so poorly lighted and heated as to be frequently unusable, seemingly by preference of the pastor." So the weddings most likely had been performed in his study in the lean-to of the house. "Here comes the bride—" thought Nell. "I wonder. . . ."

The next week-end she and George made a discovery. He found that there had once been a window, since boarded up, in the little attic space over the lean-to. If there was a window there must have been a means of using the space, so they explored. In the ceiling of their downstairs coat cupboard they found a tightly nailed trap-door, which George managed to lift up with considerable damage to the woodwork and his fingers. Nell's excitement was intense and she rushed for a step-ladder, pushing it up through hanging coats and wraps in her eagerness. She followed George up the ladder and they emerged in a tiny room, its sloping ceiling so low they could hardly stand upright. They could see daylight

How to buy better work clothes



GET long wear from the tough materials and rugged sewing that go into Blue Bell work clothes. Blue Bell dungarees are cut full so they don't bind. They're Sanforized, and keep their roomy, comfortable fit as long as you wear them. Reinforced with no-scratch copper rivets. Plenty of pockets.

Blue Bell Sanforized chambray shirts are cut to body contour for comfort, and topped by a dress-type collar for good looks. For outstanding value in all kinds of work clothes, look for the Blue Bell Qualitag, which guarantees you the best made, best fitting work clothes you can buy—*or your money back!*

BLUE BELL, Inc., Empire State Bldg., New York 1
WORLD'S LARGEST PRODUCER OF WORK CLOTHES

through the cracks about the boarded up window, and, thickly covered with dust, several intriguing looking old wooden trunks.

"Wow!" said George. "The antique dealer's dream come true. Now for the museum pieces!" He produced a flashlight and they examined several of the boxes, which contained a truly astonishing litter. There were worn hymnals and detached covers of Sunday School booklets, bundles of yellowed organ music, bits of old china, together with mouse and squirrel nests, and broken shelving.

JUST then came a hail from outside. The plumber had arrived to discuss the question of rusty water pipes, and George descended, knowing he would not get back very soon. Country workmen count talk and reminiscence as part of their job.

So that was why Nell was alone when she unearthed the diary—a dilapidated journal on ruled paper, now yellow and brittle with age. It had been caught behind the painted panel in the lid of one of the old trunks, and a quick glance told Nell that it was a day to day account, frank and complete, kept by Hortense Baxter, wife of the last minister of the Baxter Creek church.

The heat of the little attic room was intense, so Nell, after another glance around, backed down the ladder, taking with her the journal and some bits of pressed glass—once mass produced, now diligently sought after by collectors. She decided to study the diary before sharing it with her husband, but washed up the glass and placed it on the old kitchen dresser. It seemed to fit perfectly there.

That evening George went to a local meeting—volunteer fire department business—and Nell began the perusal of her find.

At first Mrs. Baxter's journal was very prosaic, its entries dealing with costs of groceries, choice of green brocade for curtains, her delight in her handsome young husband, their planting of a flower garden, her meeting with various members of the congregation, and so forth. But gradually the tone changed.

"I do not know what has come over Hosea," Nell read. "It seems to me odd how he seems to *delight* in cruelty. I will not keep Duke (Nell judged Duke to be a dog) if he mistreats him so. . . . Hosea will not let me visit the neighbors. . . . Hosea has a strange library in the little attic over his study. I was wishful to dust the volumes and he struck me. They were horrible books, treating much of witchcraft. . . . I must confess curiosity anent Hosea's interest in his library of horrors took me again to his attic. He returned and when he found I was there his anger made me think of demons. He took away the ladder steps, by which one reaches the room under the eaves leaving me there for hours. I climbed out of the window to a painter's ladder, and now he has even boarded up the window. I am frightened. This is not at all the man I married."

Nell put away the journal, joined George in their usual week-end pursuits and only resumed its persual when her husband had left for his rounds. She had become aware of the fact that when George was in the house no ghostly manifestations developed. Were they a warning meant for her alone, she wondered? So vaguely she kept the diary to herself, too.

It became more and more fantastic. Gradually Hortense Baxter had begun to believe that some evil familiar from the witchcraft of his forebears had taken possession of her husband. His whole personality changed; he grew moody, subject to fits of the blackest rage and with one outstanding obsession—the performance of the marriage ceremony. A romantic aura had grown up about his old village church and young people came from near and far to have him tie their matrimonial bonds. These couples he welcomed with unctuous pleasantries, reading the marriage lines with genial ease, calling with actual joyfulness in his voice for his young wife to play the Wedding March on their small organ, and later to witness the signatures in the register. Then he would dismiss each newly made man and wife with a bland blessing.

". . . . but it is false, false!" wrote his wife in horror. "Each blessing contains a curse I hear him utter the words of his

benediction so slowly and deliberately that between them and under his breath he can mutter the black curse of the Western Witches—that each maid shall die alone in childbirth and that each man shall turn from his faith and die a blasphemer . . . about this I read in the gray book."

NELL read on, and her days were filled with the haunting tragedy of Hortense's life in her house, and her nights with sounds of the fatal wedding march that over and over again had accompanied some unwitting bride to her doom. "Today I learned that Phyllis Bayles and her baby both died," wrote Hortense. "Hosea married them but a year ago, and she was so young and joyous and happy. Now, from grief, her husband has turned against God . . . the Curse again!"

The horror of it began to tell on Nell, too. She was a bride; was she being warned? She could not bring herself to tell George of her discovery. She felt his cheerful sanity could never be brought to believe such a gruesome and fantastic record. She would resolve to burn the journal but some power beyond her control would drive her on to peruse page after yellowed page of its frightened childish script.

Hortense realized that her husband had sensed her growing knowledge of his secret; indeed she had been discovered inquiring the later history of various young couples her husband had united in wedlock. Word of her search reached her husband, the search which forced her to even clearer realization of the terrible fact that one after another of the gay young brides of Baxter Creek had lost her life, bringing life into the world.

But there was one thing Hortense had noted—not all the brides had died: at times the curse seemed ineffectual. Why, the minister's wife wondered? Her wonder, her horror, had driven her yet again to the secret reading of her husband's books—and there she had found the answer.

"The black curse of the Witches of the West fails," wrote Hortense, "if the destined victim *approaches from the East*. . . . Hosea has changed the doorway of his study so that it faces West. . . . Dear God, I know why, and I am fearful he will kill me lest I warn these innocent young people and try to usher them in by the front door . . . another marriage today, such a pretty guileless young thing. He forced me to play the Wedding March. I knew they had come straight to the study door. . . . I *must* find some way to stop all this. My husband's very soul belongs to the devil. Would that I could buy it back."

After this the entries grew more and more incoherent, seemingly with terror, and the last one was a resolve to hide this diary which might incite her husband to murder. "Hide it from him, I must," wrote the frantic young woman. "I do not know where to turn for help; who would believe such infamy?"

Nell shuddered. She could only guess that Hortense's accident had been a contrived one; she remembered the ironic line on her gravestone about a false step. Had her husband caused it to be put there, and after her death continued the practice of his evil rites?

That night the manifestations increased in intensity. Wakened by the sound of the organ and its recurrent March, Nell saw a queer light outside her bedroom door. Against the blank wall of the upstairs hall there materialized before her startled eyes a ghostly procession. Pacing slowly to the weird throbbing of the music, one after another the doomed brides of Baxter Creek, their veils drawn, their trains sweeping the floor, passed across the wall as on a screen. Following them was the huge and sinister figure of the clergyman, his gown flapping, his head bowed, and behind him scurried a little wistful, terrified figure. His wife seemed to look imploringly at Nell as if warning of peril and pleading for help. Though she was only a transparent shadow, Nell felt emanating from her—terror, horror and a sort of heroic despair.

The ghostly procession faded from view, the sound of the music died away and there descended the black, sinister silence Nell had learned to know.

"How *can* I help you, Hortense? What can I do?" Nell pleaded to the breathless, empty house, but her only answer was in Breezy's plaintive whimpering.

III

THAT she could not accomplish this by herself was Nell's heartfelt conclusion and when George came home that week-end she told him the whole incredible story.

He was much less skeptical than she had feared, kissed her fervently and said he'd been worried that she had been growing so thin and pale.

"I thought it was climate," he said. "If it's only ghosts, we'll lay 'em. No Reverend Baxter is going to haunt me out of my house."

Nell laughed in relief and together they studied Hortense's battered journal.

"Wish we could find some of the old boy's books—curses and all," said George. "Let's have another look at that Historical Society library."

They drove to town, Nell not being able to help a wry chuckle to herself at the idea of a man like George spending a Saturday afternoon pouring over local archives. But their visit proved very enlightening. First of all, they encountered an elderly clergyman, another researcher, who many years before had retired as minister of the church in the town. He remembered the Baxter Creek church and the story of its eccentric last incumbent. He, too, was interested in the documents concerning the church, and even mentioned casually that the Reverend Mr. Baxter's library had been burned by town authorities when it had been discovered during a house cleaning prior to one rental of the house.

"I suppose they were right from their standpoint," he sighed, "but some very rare volumes on demonology went up in smoke. Queer subject for a minister to be studying," he remarked.

"Maybe he learned how to make himself disappear," suggested Nell. "He certainly seems to have vanished."

The old gentleman gave her a queer, startled look. "Well," he said, "other folks than you suggested that, I remember. The local blacksmith—his shop stood below your house; it's gone now—maintained he saw him out in an epic thunderstorm, his arms raised as if invoking the lightning. And, as a matter of fact, no one remembered seeing him after that. Lots of stories were circulated about it at the time; but, of course, it's long ago now."

"Rum deal," commented George, still examining cases of documents labelled "Baxter Creek Church." Suddenly he whistled. "Nell, my girl, a clue, a clue!" he exclaimed and held up a battered book. The cover, to be sure, proclaimed it to be "Hymns Ancient and Modern," but it had been used to conceal another gray-covered work, very old indeed, it's title being, "Handbook of the Witches of the West." A sub title announced it to include, "Their Cult, Their Curses, and the *Laying of the Ghosts They Raise.*" On its flyleaf ancient script proclaimed it to be the property of Amos and Emily Baxter, A.D. 1682.

To arrange to borrow the book might have aroused comment, so George blatantly concealed it under his coat and he and Nell took their departure, the elderly clergyman looking after them with curious eyes.

"This one must have been removed with the church records, the way the old boy had it covered up," said George. "Otherwise it might have been found by the book burners."

"Now what?" asked Nell, and the answer seemed to be a careful study of the old volume they had purloined—to use a polite word. Surely it must be the very one from which Hortense had gleaned her gruesome information; Hortense whose spirit was doomed to unrest in that she had died before she could fulfill her mission to counteract the evil perpetrated by her demon-possessed husband.

Their very discovery of the book seemed to help her, for, although that night for the first time when George was at home Nell heard the ghostly music of the Wedding March, it seemed to strike an almost triumphant tone.

THE Handbook gave the Howards a very complete exposition of the Witches of the West. Apparently, with their adverse influence coming from the East, they were a development of the days when witchcraft itself had been struggling between benevolence and malevolence. They read of their

ancient cult for evil, their obscene rites, the spirit engendered by them which might enter into the body of a man of God and cause him to promote evil instead of good.

"That's what happened to Baxter all right," said George. "I feel we should only handle this book with fire tongs. Anyway, we'll burn it. The town fathers will have nothing on us."

"Of course," agreed Nell, "but not before we see if we can find some sort of charm to answer a curse like this. I think Hortense found it—oh, why didn't she write down her discovery!"

"You know what?" said George. "I bet the Reverend gentleman first found this book by accident among his family possessions, and from there on in he began to study the whole queer business. . . . Here we are!" he exclaimed.

"You're getting quite good at it yourself," said Nell, almost fearfully. But we must, we must. . . ."

"If ye spirit of one protesting a curse appears in ghostly form," read George, "it is most like to appear to a similar situated person as the one so cursed . . . that's you, my girl bride."

"Oh, George, don't even in fun," said Nell. "It was so real, so horrible . . ." and she shuddered.

"Well, we can fix it," said George, "for the black curse on brides and grooms is all gone into here. Guess that's where the Reverend got his dope. We—you and I—are the sort to do it, being uncursed and man and wife within a short time—proceed to a graveyard at dusk. We walk backwards (that'll be tough on rough ground) East to West across three graves, and always with our backs to the West, we take hands and we say. . . . Well, we don't need to say it now, but it's all here. Seems it will break any remnant of a curse hanging around and quiet the protesting ghost—Hortense in this case, you say."

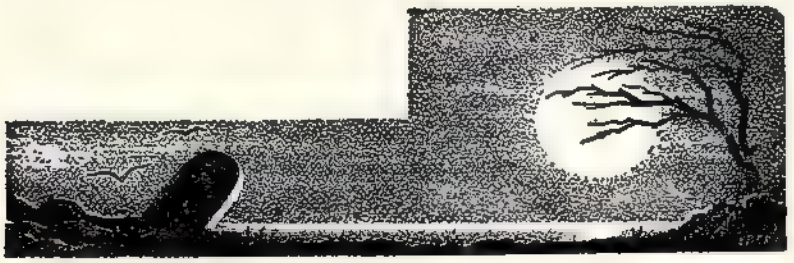
IV

SO AT dusk of the next day two modern, sophisticated young and happily married people walked from their haunted house the few steps that took them to the old burying ground of the former church of Baxter Creek. Among the briars and weeds they carefully stepped on three graves as marked by their leaning headstones, and their backs always to the West, George solemnly pronounced words, weird, portentous and but half understood, found in an ancient Witches' Handbook—George, whose line was soapflakes, and who'd never even given a thought to things supernatural.

As they returned home, the moon came up over the locust trees around the site of the old church, and from the house came Breezy, frisking to meet them as any pup should. Deliberately they burned the old Handbook—using a sassafras root as instructed in the book itself for consuming "any object of evil whatsoever." That night no music sounded in the little house, no stair treads creaked, no black stillness blotted out the usual country night noises, and Breezy slept quietly, sprawled in his comfortable box.

The next morning after George had gone Nell visited the old graveyard. All was peaceful. A wood thrush sang, crickets chirped and from a nearby field came the mechanical sound of a mower at work. Nell looked at Hortense's grave. Below the familiar inscription now apparent for the first time—or were they newly carved there? —were the words:

REST IN PEACE



H. P. Lovecraft, master of weird fiction, has something unusual to say in

Dagon

Heading by E. E. Cleland

I AM writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. Penniless, and at the end of my supply of the drug which alone makes life endurable, I can bear the torture no longer; and shall cast myself from this garret window into the squalid street below. Do not think from my slavery to morphine that I am a weakling or a degenerate. When you have read these hastily scrawled pages you may guess, though never fully realize, why it is that I must have forgetfulness or death.

It was in one of the most open and least frequented parts of the Pacific that the packet of which I was supercargo fell a victim to the German sea-raider. The great war was then at its very beginning, and the enemy's navy had not reached its later degree of ruthlessness, so that our vessel was made a legitimate prize, whilst we of her crew were treated with all the fairness and consideration due us as naval prisoners. So liberal, indeed, was the discipline of our captors, that five days after we were taken I managed to escape alone in a small boat

with water and provisions for a good length of time.

When I finally found myself adrift and free, I had but little idea of my surroundings. Never a competent navigator, I could only guess vaguely by the sun and stars that I was somewhat south of the equator. Of the longitude I knew nothing, and no island or coast-line was in sight. The weather kept fair, and for uncounted days I drifted aimlessly beneath the scorching sun; waiting either for some passing ship, or to be cast on the shores of some habitable land. But neither ship nor land appeared, and I began to despair.

The change happened whilst I slept. Its details I shall never know; for my slumber, though troubled and dream-infested, was continuous. When at last I awaked, it was to discover myself half sucked into a slimy expanse of hellish black mire which extended about me in monotonous undulations as far as I could see, and in which my boat lay grounded some distance away.

Though one might well imagine that my first sensation would be of wonder at so prodigious and unexpected a transformation of scenery, I was in reality more horrified than astonished, for there was in the air and in the rotting soil a sinister quality which chilled me to the very core. The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things which I saw protruding from the nasty mud of the unending plain.

The sun was blazing down from a sky which seemed to me almost black in its cloudless cruelty; as though reflecting the inky marsh beneath my feet. As I crawled into the stranded boat I realized that only one theory could explain my position. Through some unprecedented volcanic upheaval, a portion of the ocean floor must have been thrown to the surface, exposing regions which for innumerable millions of years had lain hidden under unfathomable watery depths. So great was the extent of the new land which had risen under me, that I could not detect the faintest noise of the surging ocean, strain my ears as I might.

For several hours I sat thinking or brooding in the boat, which lay upon its side and afforded a slight shade as the sun moved across the heavens. As the day progressed, the ground lost some of its stickiness, and seemed likely to dry sufficiently for traveling purposes in a short time. That night I slept but little, and the next day I made for myself a pack containing food and water, preparatory to an overland journey in search of the vanished sea and possible rescue.

On the third morning I found the soil dry enough to walk upon with ease. The odor of the fish was maddening; but I was too much concerned with graver things to mind so slight an evil, and set out boldly for an unknown goal. All day I forged steadily westward, guided by a far-away hummock which rose higher than any other elevation on the rolling desert. That night I camped, and on the following day still traveled toward the hummock, though that object seemed scarcely nearer than when I had first spied it. By the fourth evening I attained the base of the mound, which turned out to be much higher than it had appeared from a distance.

I do not know why my dreams were so wild that night, but before the waning and fantastically gibbous moon had risen far above the eastern plain, I was awake in a cold perspiration, determined to sleep no more. Such visions as I had experienced were too much for me to endure again. And in the glow of the moon I saw how unwise I had been to travel by day. Without the glare of the parching sun, my journey would have cost me less energy; indeed, I now felt quite able to perform the ascent which had deterred me at sunset. Picking up my pack, I started for the crest of the eminence.

I HAVE said that the unbroken monotony of the rolling plain was a source of vague horror to me; but I think my horror was greater when I gained the summit of the mound and looked down the other side into an immeasurable pit or canyon, whose black recesses the moon had not yet soared high enough to illumine. I felt myself on the edge of the world; peering over the rim into a fathomless chaos of eternal night. Through my terror ran curious reminiscences of Paradise Lost, and of Satan's hideous climb through the unfashioned realms of darkness.

As the moon climbed higher in the sky, I began to see that the slopes of the valley were not quite so perpendicular as I had imagined. Ledges and outcroppings of rock afforded fairly easy footholds for a descent, whilst after a drop of a few hundred feet, the declivity became very gradual. Urged on by an impulse which I cannot definitely analyze, I scrambled with difficulty down the rocks and stood on the gentler slope beneath, gazing into the Stygian deeps where no light had yet penetrated.

All at once my attention was captured by a vast and singular object on the opposite slope, which rose steeply about a hundred yards ahead of me; an object that gleamed whitely in the newly bestowed rays of the ascending moon. That it was merely a gigantic piece of stone, I soon assured myself; but I was conscious of a distinct impression that its contour and position were not altogether the work of Nature. A closer scrutiny filled me with sensations I cannot express; for despite its enormous magnitude, and its location in an abyss which had yawned at the bottom of the sea since the world was young, I perceived beyond a doubt that the strange object was a well-shaped monolith whose massive bulk had known the workmanship and perhaps the worship of living and thinking creatures.

Dazed and frightened, yet not without a certain thrill of the scientist's or archaeologist's delight, I examined my surroundings more closely. The moon, now near the zenith, shone weirdly and vividly above the towering steeps that hemmed in the chasm, and revealed the fact that a far-flung body of water flowed at the bottom, winding out of sight in both directions, and almost lapping my feet as I stood on the slope.

Across the chasm, the wavelets washed the base of the Cyclopean monolith; on whose surface I could now trace both inscriptions and crude sculptures. The writing was in a system of hieroglyphics unknown to me, and unlike anything I had ever seen in books; consisting for the most part of conventionalized aquatic symbols such as fishes, eels, octopi, crutaceans, molluscs, whales, and the like.

It was the pictorial carving, however, that did most to hold me spellbound. Plainly visible across the intervening water on account of their enormous size, were an array of bas-reliefs whose subjects would have excited the envy of a Doré. I think that these things were supposed to depict men—at least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shown disporting like fishes in the waters of some marine grotto, or paying homage at some monolithic shrine which appeared to be under the waves as well. Of their faces and forms I dare not speak in detail; for the mere remembrance makes me grow faint. Grotesque beyond the imagination of a Poe or a Bulwer, they were damnably human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes, and other features less pleasant to recall. Curiously enough, they seemed to have been chiseled badly out of proportion with their scenic background; for one of the creatures was shown in the act of killing a whale represented as but little larger than himself.

I remarked, as I say, their grotesqueness and strange size; but in a moment decided that they were merely the imaginary gods of some primitive fishing or seafaring tribe; some tribe whose last descendant had perished eras before the first ancestor of the Piltdown or Neanderthal man was born. Awestruck at this unexpected glimpse into a past beyond the conception of the most daring anthropologist, I stood musing, whilst the moon cast queer reflections on the silent channel before me.

Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.

Of my frantic ascent of the slope and cliff, and of my delirious journey back to the stranded boat, I remember little. I believe I sang a great deal, and laughed oddly when I was unable to sing. I have indistinct recollections of a great storm some time after I reached the boat; at any rate, I

know that I heard peals of thunder and other tones which Nature utters only in wild and terrible moods.

WHEN I came out of the shadows I was in a San Francisco hospital; brought thither by the captain of the American ship which had picked up my boat in mid-ocean. In my delirium I had said much, but found that my words had been given scant attention. Of any land upheaval in the Pacific, my rescuers knew nothing; nor did I deem it necessary to insist upon a thing which I knew they could not believe. Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God; but, soon perceiving that he was hopelessly conventional, I did not press my inquiries.

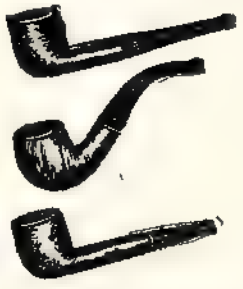
It is at night, especially when the moon is gibbous and waning, that I see the thing. I tried morphine, but the drug has given only transient surcease, and has drawn me into its clutches as a hopeless slave. So now I am going to end matters, having written a full account for the information or the contemptuous amusement of my fellow-men. Often I ask myself if it could not all have been a pure phantasm—a mere freak of fever as I lay sun-stricken and raving in the open boat after my escape from the German man-of-war.

This I ask myself, but ever does there come before me a hideously vivid vision in reply. I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind—of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. It shall not find me. God, *that hand!* The window! The window!

SWITCH TO MILD KENTUCKY CLUB

The Thoroughbred of Pipe Tobaccos



Get Fine Pipes at Worth-while SAVINGS

You bet it pays to switch to Kentucky Club. It's the thoroughbred of pipe tobaccos—choice white Burley specially blended to give you a mild, smooth smoke with grand taste and aroma. In addition, every package of Kentucky Club contains a valuable Dividend Coupon. Save these Coupons and get your choice of fine pipes at *big savings*. Beautiful pipes of imported briar made by expert craftsmen. 14 shapes. Do these two things today. Buy your first tin of Kentucky Club. Mail coupon for free catalog.

FREE Illustrated catalog showing Kentucky Club Dividend pipes and other premiums.
Mail Pouch Tobacco Co., Dept. 89, Wheeling, West Virginia
Please send—free—Kentucky Club Catalog.

Name.....
Street.....
City.....State.....

by Margaret St. Clair

Heading by Joseph Eberle

There was heat coming from the bird cage—quite noticeable heat

THERE is a story about the captain of a freighter who, summoned by his first mate to see an indubitable sea serpent disporting itself a few yards to port of his ship, refused, on the reasonable ground that if he saw the sea serpent he'd have to put it in the log, and he didn't want to be known as a man who saw sea serpents all the rest of his life.

"Oooh, look at the poor bird, daddee!" Timmy shrieked.

Dwight Thompson looked. In the two months which had elapsed since he had built the bird bath to assist Timothy in his nature study, the structure had been visited by a number of queer specimens. That which was now perching on the edge of the basin, gripping it with a scaly, yellowish claw, struck Thompson as being a new low.

Scrawny, rusty, ill-favored, it resembled nothing so much as a bundle of quills topped by a rheumy eye. It was a perfect scarecrow of a bird, a creature so utterly lacking in appeal or personality that the kindest-hearted person would have had no hesitation in consigning it to the garbage can. Thompson whistled.

"I'll chase it away," he offered after a moment.

"Oh, *no!*" Timmy said. "The poor, poor *thing!* We'll take it in the house, daddy, an' feed it an' care for it an' make it well!" By nature a dissector of flies, a puller of cat's tails, training and repression had succeeded, of late, in covering Timothy's native savagery with a layer of unctuously insincere kindliness. At the present moment, he fairly dripped.

"The hell you say!" Thompson barked injudiciously, forgetting Mildred's embargo on profanity before his child. "I won't have a thing like that in the house!"

Timothy stared at him for a moment, while his face grew red. Then he closed his eyes, puffed out his cheeks, and began to howl. If it be possible for an eleven-year-old child to be lubberly and a lout, that, Thompson thought as he watched his son screaming, was what Timothy was.

Mildred appeared on the back porch. "What are you two arguing about?" she said brightly. One of the things which irked Thompson most about his wife was her habit of addressing him and his son as if they were exactly equal in point of age.

"It's daddy!" Timothy bellowed. "He won't let me care for the bird, the poor, poor bird! It's sick. An' if it stays out all night, it'll—" he paused and gulped dramatically—"it'll *die!*"

Mildred looked in the direction Timothy was indicating. For a moment, Thompson saw with satisfaction, she was visibly taken aback. She swallowed. Then she recovered herself.

"Well, now, Dwight," she said reasonably, "it won't hurt anything for him to bring the bird in the house. He can put it in Fluffy's old cage." (Fluffy was the canary Timothy had given to the cat a few months before,) "I'm sure it's very kind of him to want to care for it."

"It'll be covered with lice," Dwight pointed out.

"I'll dust some of that powder I got for Fluffy over its wings. Run in the house, son, and get the cage."

Thus it was that Thompson, so to speak, laid eyes on the sea serpent.

THE cage, over Thompson's protests, was installed in a corner of the living room. When it had been placed to Mildred's satisfaction, Dwight went over and looked morosely at the creature it contained. Immobile (the bird had not even blinked when Timmy had grabbed it around the wings and stuffed it into Fluffy's old cage), devoid of personality, almost of identity, the thing yet managed to dominate the room and fill it with itself. Its scraggy nonentity was more impressive than a cage full of lyre birds would have been.

Thompson pulled his arm chair around so that its back was toward the cage, and sat down. Even in this position he was uneasily aware of the bird. He picked up the book he had started yesterday—a volume in praise of mental ill-health, called BE GLAD YOU'RE NEUROTIC, which some-

one had recommended to him—and started to read.

Timothy came bounding into the room. "What do you think you're doing?" his father demanded irritably, glancing up from his book.

"Jus' taking that poor bird some stuff so he can make hisself a nice lil' nest."

"Let's see what you've got."

Timothy's face puckered up in a tentative bawl. Then, deciding that his mother would probably not back him up, his face relaxed. Reluctantly he approached his father and opened his right hand.

It contained three or four lengths of string, a tooth pick, a bit of pink fluff that must have come from Mildred's marabou-trimmed bed jacket, and a few straws from the whisk broom.

"Hum. What's in your other hand?"

Much more reluctantly this time, Timmy's dirty little paw unclosed itself. It held three pieces of stick cinnamon.

"What makes you think the bird would like that for a nest?" Thompson asked with genuine curiosity.

Timothy wriggled. For a moment puzzlement made his face childish, almost appealing. "I don' know," he answered. "I just sort of do."

"Well, all right," Thompson replied, losing interest rapidly. "Go ahead. Only try not to make so much noise, will you?"

"O. K., daddee," Timothy said.

In the next few trips Timothy took the bird peppercorns, whole cloves, some ground-up mace, and two or three big flat cardamom seeds which Mildred had bought once to make Swedish coffee bread. Thompson ignored him resolutely. It was wonderful, when you had children, how much you could ignore them when you tried.

Just before he went up to bed, Thompson went over and looked at the bird once more. It was as motionless as ever, but at some time during the evening it must have exerted itself sufficiently to form Timmy's offering into the flat dais on which it now perched. The various spices had been worked neatly, almost symmetrically, into the top.

"You're a hell of a looking thing," Thompson said. He prodded at the bird with an irresolute forefinger. The bird made no response of any sort. Thompson turned and went up the stair.

WHEN his alarm went off the next morning, he felt more than his usual reluctance to get up. He had a fairly good job, a wife whom an outsider would have described as "wonderful" and three children whom the same outsider, though with some hesitation, would have called wonderful, too. He was a gratifying handful of years on the rightside of middle age, and he enjoyed good health. Yet—Thompson winced as Mildred's "Hurry, dear!" came floating up the stair well—there were times, like today, when he felt he didn't know what he was living for. He must read some more in that book tonight. Perhaps the author had something to say about feelings like his.

Thompson had a normally exasperating day. Nothing unusual, just the customary assortment of soreheads, unreasonable complaints, flibbertigibbets and wise guys trying to get away with rough stuff. As he sat in the bosom of his family after supper, reading BE GLAD YOU'RE NEUROTIC again, Priscilla came up to him holding a dish in her hand.

Priscilla he considered the least offensive of his three off-spring. She was quiet, well-behaved, and always addressed him politely. Quite often she did what he told her to do. "Have some of my peanuts, daddy," she said.

"Thanks," Thompson answered. Without looking up from his book, he groped for the dish and took a handful of nuts from it. It was a safe enough action in the case of Priscilla; had it been Timmy who offered the nuts to him, Thompson would have been on the watch for fishhooks, small pebbles, and carpet tacks.

"Daddy, that bird's all hot," his daughter said. Her speech was muffled and indistinct; she had taken some peanuts herself.

"Unh, go ask your mother," Thompson said, still trying to read.

"She's taking a bubble bath. Daddy, that bird's all *hot.*"

"Um-hum."

"No, but daddy, you come look at it. He's as hot as anything." Priscilla tugged at his sleeve.

Thompson put down the book and blinked. Priscilla was obviously not trying to play a trick on him, as Timothy would have been. Her face was serious and intent. After a moment he heaved himself up from his chair and followed Priscilla over to the cage.

The heat was noticeable at once. Standing before the cage was like standing in front of a warming oven. Thompson blinked. Incredulously he passed his hands over and around the cage. The heat, gentle, rather agreeable, was from every point the same.

"See, daddy?" Priscilla said, looking up into his face. "The bird's all hot. Daddy, what makes it that way?"

There was a long pause. "I guess it's feverish," Thompson said at last.

When he checked up on the bird again before he went to bed, he found to his relief (a relief somewhat dashed with disappointment, for the heat had been a phenomenon of the first water) that the bird had cooled off. It was by now very little, if any, warmer than the surrounding air. Perhaps Thompson (and Priscilla?) had imagined the earlier heat; perhaps the bird really had been suffering from fever of a peculiar sort.

Thompson woke up about two-thirty in the morning, extremely thirsty from the peanuts he had eaten the night before. For a moment he thought of going to the bathroom for a drink, and then declined the idea. Timothy and Dorcas slept next door, and they were sure to waken and want drinks too if they heard him in the bath. Thompson pulled on his robe, stepped into his slippers, and went softly down the stairs.

On his way to the kitchen he was too foggy with sleep to notice anything, but when he started back, full to slopping with cold water, he saw the faint glow coming from the living room. He went in.

The room, the cage, the bird, were just as he had left them, with this difference: the bird, motionless as ever, was now out-

lined in pale yellow light. Thompson's jaw dropped. As he stood staring at the cage the bird, for the first time since he had set eyes on it, moved.

Slowly it bent its head and plucked one of the luminous quills from its breast. Holding it by the end, it scraped the quill sharply against one of the sticks of cinnamon.

The action was that of a man striking a match; and, as if the quill had really been a match, there was an immediate burst of flame. The dais—the pyre—under the bird ignited first and then, with a sudden upward gush of fire, the bird itself began to burn.

Now was the moment for Thompson to have run for the fire extinguisher in the kitchen, to have ignored the peculiarities of the situation and have concentrated every nerve upon the immediate task of putting out the blaze.

Thompson did not move. With the first upward jet of fire thrills of delight had begun to run over his flesh. The fire with which the bird burned was emerald and turquoise, sapphire and blue, and the colors fell on Thompson's ravished sense of sight like delicious sound upon the ear. His eyes bugged out, his jaw came open till it reached its nadir. He could not have moved had his life depended upon it.

The supernal flames mounted higher and dripped in long sheets from the bird's breast. Thompson's face took on an expression of blank and idiotic bliss. He watched in a glassy trance of felicitude while the colors sang to him ravishingly, with the voice of ecstasy itself. He seemed to be drowning in a flood of delight, dying in a rapture greater than his body could contain.

For a long, long moment the bird stood still and burned, and green and gold topaz were like perfume in the air. Then it flapped its wings twice and shot, like an arrow of fire, straight through the roof.

THE house burned to the ground; with the exception of an Erector set, which Timmy had had the foresight to throw out the window before jumping out himself, the Thompsons lost everything. Even the copy of BE GLAD YOU'RE NEUROTIC was burnt.

Fortunately, none of the family was hurt, and their losses were covered by insurance. The fire as attributed to defective wiring in the attic, and the insurance company, after no more than the usual stalling, paid the full amount of the claim. Dwight applied the check to the purchase of a house in a district which Mildred considered better than the one in which they had been living. He told no one about the bird.

Two years later the Thompsons' new house caught fire. Serious damage to the structure was narrowly averted. This time there was no question of defective wiring—the fire had started in the basement, near the coal bin.

The insurance company sent out two men from the Philadelphia office who poked around in the basement for nearly a week, filling out reports and asking questions of everyone in the house, before they were satisfied. Dwight's theory as to the origin of the fire—that a spark from the furnace had ignited a heap of kindling—they received with definite chilliness, and after the claim had been paid the company exercised its option and canceled the policy. Mildred could put two and two together. She began to watch her husband, tight-lipped and suspiciously.

Dwight made a heroic effort to keep his new urge under control. He was ashamed, not so much of the impulse itself, as of the illogic of the motive which prompted it. In his attempts at suppression he gave up smoking, replaced the gas range in the kitchen with an electric one, and forbade the children to bring matches into the house. He became an assiduous reader of booklets on fire prevention. He bought a number of heavy-duty fire extinguishers and installed them in strategic spots through the house.

But on three separate occasions Mildred caught him in the basement with matches, excelsior, and kerosene. She consulted her doctor, who sent her to a specialist. When Dwight actually succeeded, the night before the Memorial Day parade, in setting fire to the wooden grandstand which had been put up on Main Street, she was forced, very re-

luctantly, to sign commitment papers for him.

He is in the state asylum now. No doubt he will be there for the rest of his life. He has made one or two abortive attempts to set the building on fire, but the structure is solid concrete.

The chief psychiatrist, considering him an interesting case, tried hard with him at first. But by now he has grown resigned to Thompson's inability to recognize the Freudian roots of his mania. The psychiatrist has gone on to patients with whom there is some hope of success.

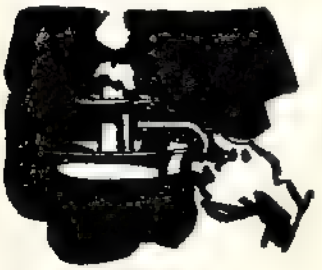
Thompson refuses to consider his difficulty a mania. Why can't the doctors recognize that it isn't pyromania he's suffering from? As he always tells them, he admits it isn't logical, but setting fires is the only thing he can think of which might put him in touch with the bird. He keeps hoping it will come to one of his fires. It was so beautiful, the most beautiful thing he ever laid eyes on. He's sorry about the fires, but what else is he to do? He doesn't see how he can bear to wait five hundred years to have the opportunity of seeing the Phoenix again.

Hallowe'en Candle

By YETZA GILLESPIE

STANDING like a woman,
Her candle blown out,
Who hides in stillness
From what may be about

The earth's heart thuds
But its breath comes light,
And the trees give tongue,
"Tonight! Tonight . . ."



The dry leaves tick
On the paving stones
With the sapless sound
Of a cane, or bones.

Oh, stealthy! Oh, swiftly!
Lay a wary head
On safe goosefeathers
At middle of the bed.

The stars burn green
As the eyes of owls;
At the moon's white heels
The grey wind howls.

Imagine a spectral dog consuming food!

Hector

BY MICHAEL WEST

"I WISH you'd read this before you say anything, Mr. Blaik."

"Very well," said the real estate agent, taking the letter.

"It's not that I'm complaining; I simply want you to know. We do, that is—my husband and I."

"Yes, of course. I'll read it now."

He glanced despairingly at the clock, estimated the letter's length, and began to read the uncertain script. The letter was undated; it bore no address; but by its heading, "Dear John," Blaik concluded that the letter had been written to George Hesperson's old friend, John Malling. And left unmailed, no doubt. He read.

"After so long a silence—actually, I don't know quite how long, but it seems as if it might have been six months at least—I don't doubt you'll be surprised to get a letter from me at last. Perhaps you wrote to me; I've forgotten. I could not have answered. And no doubt you'll have been wondering what became of me since my accident.

"I don't know yet how I survived the collapse of that wall—a near miracle, I call it—but I lost Hector. You remember Hector—I never had a better dog, and I'll never have another. Because, in a way, I have Hector still. You'll think I've gone off center, but I've got to tell someone about it. Grabers, who live here with me, simply won't listen to me. It's an extraordinary thing, but they can simply pretend they aren't hearing me when I try to tell them things.

"I don't know just when it was that I first saw Hector. I thought it was an illusion, of course; he had been gone for so long. I thought I saw him lying on the hall rug in the sunlight from the window at the landing, the way he always used to lie, a ball of soft brown and white, with his black nose laid across his tail. Mid-afternoon. An odd time for a ghost to show up, you'll think. I did.

"But it *was* a ghost. I saw him just as plain as possible. I blinked my eyes to shut him away; but he wasn't gone. So I went over to him, and he got up to be petted, just the way he always did. He cocked his head and whined a little and I petted him. By this time you're thinking that I've really gone off half cocked, but there it is, and I swear it's quite true. The house is haunted by Hector's ghost.

"Of course, I saw him again. And again. The second time was only a day or so later. I'd been keeping pretty much to my room, but that day I went down to the living room and sat down near the window. Quite suddenly Hector was there, with his head laid on my knee, his ears back, and his liquid brown eyes looking at me. I tell you it gave me a queer feeling. I petted him again, but petting a ghost isn't quite like the real thing; you don't actually feel anything, and your hand just seems to go through it, and yet there's an indefinable line of demarcation. What I mean to say is that, though I didn't feel Hector's fur the way I did when Hector was alive, still my hand could describe the outline of his head. And he put up his ears to be scratched behind, just as always.

"I have no doubt but that you're shaking your head and telling yourself that

poor old George always was a little touched about that dog; and of course old George was. Hector never asked for anything but affection and a little attention, and he certainly gave plenty of both in return, which is more, I suspect, than we could say of many of our friends, present company excluded, as they say. Well, stop shaking your head; I'm not that touched yet. I can't deny the evidence of my own senses, and Hector is just as real right now as you were the last time we had dinner together at Frascatti's.

"How long ago was that, by the way? My memory seems particularly frightful, which is one aftermath of the shock of that wall falling on me, I suppose. We shall have to get together soon again, unless by this time you're convinced I'm no longer stable enough to go about with.

"This matter of Hector's ghost requires some explanation, certainly. I can only make a stab at it. Dogs attach themselves to people and places, and Hector spent most of his life here with me. So I assume it is only natural that, if Hector were destined to return in spectral shape, he would come back here. At any rate, his presence comforts me. During those first dreadful, disorganized days, when I seemed to be in a coma or in some place of bewildering darkness, I missed him terribly. After all, he was my only companion for more than seven years, and nothing could be more natural than that I'd miss him keenly.

"I had guessed he had been killed by the wall, even though I didn't see him when it came down. But he had been with me; he usually kept after me pretty closely; he was well trained and heeled at the slightest command. He still keeps after me, following me around from time to time, upstairs and down, as always. He comes and sits at my side when I'm relaxing or reading, puts his nose up to me and begs for a little attention.

"A dog's devotion doubtless flatters a man's ego, and I'm not immune. I wouldn't part with Hector while he was alive, and I'm damned if I'll part with Hector's ghost now he's dead!

"But I must confess there's one thing about Hector that puzzles me—or Hector's ghost, I should say. He appears to be eminently friendly with the Grabers—Mr. and Mrs. Henry and Edna to you—who have moved in. Rather, they were here when I came out of the accident; I suppose they had been sent by Dr. Bannerman to look after me, though they're rather cold and distant people, which may be proper and desirable in people who have a specific charge like this one. Hector was always pretty much of a one man dog, but no doubt my long absence forced him to make friends with the Grabers, who treat him very kindly, just like a member of the family, the way I used to.

"But those infernally distant people will simply not listen when I try to tell them about Hector. That *they* should see him is, I think, the final proof of his actual existence as a ghost, though sometimes they do not appear to see him; they look to where he is with a kind of worried perplexity on their features, as if they *felt* something there, but couldn't *quite* make out what it was. Yet at other times they do very plainly

see him, and I believe they actually put out food for the dog—if you can imagine a spectral dog devouring it! But since the food is put out on the back stoop, stray dogs invariably eat it, and these people very likely conclude that Hector has done away with it.

"In this sense, at least, they are gullible enough. But at least their gullibility is on the side of the angels; so I should not complain. They could so easily have made a scene at Hector's appearance and gone off in a dither—though now that I'm able to get about by myself, I don't suppose that would necessarily have been fatal.

"Hector seems to have adopted his old routines, though he interrupts anything he's at to come to me whenever I come near him—sits up and begs, wants to shake hands, roll over tidbits, and so on. There never was a dog as friendly as Hector, either—he knew to whom he belonged, but he never snarled and bared his teeth against visitors.

"I know this whole thing sounds whacky, but do believe me, I'm writing you only what has happened to me since the accident. Poor Hector! And yet, his ghost looks none the worse for wear. Or would it? I confess ghost-lore is a little beyond me.

"I've been at this letter a long time, it seems, and I still tire very easily. I have a hard time holding the pen, and sometimes I think I'm getting weaker, not stronger. Just the same, I want you to run up here sometime if you can, and I'll find out whether you can see Hector, too. He'll know you; he never forgets any of my friends. He'll come bounding up to you, wagging his whole hind end—his ghost retains all his traits in life. I suppose it would, wouldn't it?

"But I do want you to come. Hector would probably enjoy someone other than the Grabers and myself, for a change. I doubt that you'll like the Grabers, nice though they seem to be; they don't give one a chance to know them and . . .

"Ah, here's Hector again, head on my knee. This combination of fox terrier and collie makes a damnably pleasant companion, and a dog with very good lines. If mongrels had a dog show, Hector could easily have taken a blue ribbon!

"Mrs. Graber is poking her head into the room. She has that kind of look in her eye typical of women who are housecleaning. Here she comes, without ceremony, too . . ."

THAT was all. Blaik looked up, his expression peculiar.

"Extraordinary," he said.

"Isn't it!"

"You found this in his room, you say?"

"Yes. In the room that we understood was his. We've kept it closed, of course, but I do go in to clean up once in a while."

"Do I understand that you're making a complaint, Mrs. Graber? The lease runs for some time, two years or more yet, I think . . ."

"No, not exactly a complaint. I don't know who's responsible for this, this . . ."

"Hoax," supplied Blaik, smiling wryly. "Though what anyone hoped to gain, I don't know. Those who saw George Hesperson—or what was left of him—off to the cemetery could hardly . . ."

Mrs. Graber interrupted him. "Hoax? Perhaps, though I don't see quite how anyone could have got up to his room unnoticed. But whatever you call it, we have no intention of leaving the place, no. It's cozy and pleasant, now that the wall's been fixed."

"And the dog?"

"We're keeping Hector, of course. I wouldn't think of turning out so nice a dog. Still, it's a little disconcerting from time to time to see him sitting there just exactly as if he were getting his head patted or his ears scratched, and looking at something we can't see. He's the only dog I've ever known who practises sitting up to beg and rolling over for tidbits and actually expecting them for practise alone when there's not a soul around to give out. I suppose dogs, like human beings, live inner lives, too. Hector certainly does . . ."

the NIGHT THEY CRASHED THE PARTY

. . . the television screen showed it, but where was the wire connection?

by ROBERT BLOCH

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

THE whole thing came as a surprise. Nobody expected anything like it—but then, that's the way it was at Rudy's parties. You never could tell what might happen next.

It started just the way those things always did. Rudy called me up and said, "You'd better drop over. Having a gang in, just for laughs."

"For laughs, count me in," I told him. "But remember, I'm on the wagon. Ever since that last brawl of yours, when somebody socked that Senator—"

"Forget it," laughed Rudy. "In our business, you gotta drink. And once in a while you gotta sock a Senator or two. A Navy contract is a Navy contract. Which reminds me, put on a clean shirt when you come. We're having Admiral Cribber and a lot of brass. Also some models."

"Models? For them I'll find a clean shirt," I promised. "See you later."

I found my clean shirt and got started for Rudy's place along about nine.

Nine o'clock of a summer Saturday night. I'm not likely to forget it. Walking down the street and watching the new cars go by—station wagons, town-and-country models, convertibles from Chevy Chase.

Cars threading between tall buildings—neon signs stabbing red fingernails at the sky—and people crowding, jostling, pushing, hustling along. No, I won't forget it.

Most particularly, I remember the people. It seemed to me at the time that they looked different. Changed, somehow, from the way they looked a year or so before.

I kept thinking back to the time when Rudy and I had been broke. I wasn't on my way to any penthouse parties in those days, because Rudy didn't have a penthouse. And I didn't often have a clean shirt to

wear, either. It hadn't been easy, breaking into this manufacturing agent's racket—we'd hocked everything just to keep going.

Then along came the war scare and Rudy and I nosed into these Navy purchasing deals. All at once we were signing orders, taking on new accounts, playing around with high brass and big shot scientists and people from show business. Rudy did the fronting, I did the estimating, and we both made money. It was all right, of course; it was what we had been looking for, but sometimes I wondered what it all stacked up to in the end.

Because, like I say, people seemed to have changed. A year ago they would have been strolling along this street on a balmy summer night. There would have been a lot of couples, holding hands; a lot of families out with the kids running circles around their legs. There'd have been girls in slacks, giggling along to the movies and young fellows whistling after them. It was always that way on a warm Saturday night.

But not any more. Tonight I could feel it as I moved along. I could feel the difference, see the difference. The change had come, all right. Not only with Rudy and myself, but with everybody. Maybe it was all this war talk, and the stuff about secret weapons—maybe that's what got people down. That's what wiped the smiles off their faces, wound them up and set them off to brush, shove, elbow, bump and march along.

Anyhow, they were rushing and the cars were whizzing and even the neon signs seemed to flicker faster. Everything jerked and speeded up, like an old silent movie film.

Somehow, it got to me, bothered me. I was glad to get off the street, glad to turn into the big apartment hotel, glad to take the elevator up to Rudy's penthouse.

RUDY met me at the door. The party was already going strong. I could see it, hear it, smell it.

"Here you are at last!" Rudy said. "Come in and meet the gang." And he winked and whispered, "Cribber's been here for an hour and he's loaded. I'm gonna brace him for that radar contract later."

He didn't have to tell me. I knew the routine by heart. And I could see for myself what he'd done to the Admiral. The big front room was filled with people and the people were filled with liquor and conversation to the point where both frequently spilled over. Cribber was standing in front of the fireplace with a model named Kitty. He was a handsome, distinguished-looking old gent in a beautifully tailored uniform, and she was a gorgeous brunette. But somehow, together, they didn't make a very pretty picture tonight.

"Don't give me any of that high brass stuff," the Admiral was saying. He poked Kitty right in the V of her dress. "I'm just telling you the straight scoop." His finger left a red mark on her neck, and he tried to focus both eyes on it as he swayed back on his heels. "I'm just telling you they're ready to attack."

"Blah!" That was Chester Garland, the news commentator, horning in. "Can't you guys ever stop talking business? Every time I take a story off the wire, it's one of you monkeys making a statement. I go to the movies to relax with Danny Kaye and I get a newsreel with somebody in uniform making another statement. I come up here to relax and you're on hand, sounding off."

"I'm telling you—"

"Blah! You and the whole gang's been telling me for years now. But nothing ever happens. Nothing's gonna happen. So forget it. Here, have another drink."

Rudy came up and pulled Chester away. "Lay off," he said. "Pass around these Martinis like a little man, will ya?" He handed Chester a tray.

I went up to Kitty. "What's the good word?" I said.

"Don't know any good words." She pouted. "One of those lousy Treasury department snoops showed up today. Hit me with a bill for a G in back taxes. How he ever found out about those stocks I don't know! And with this inflation and all—"

She grabbed a drink, clung to it desperately. I wandered around this gay, pleasure-seeking, carefree crowd of very important persons, celebrities, and leading intellectuals and drank in their words of wisdom.

"I tell you we've consistently underesti-

mated the possibilities of chain-reaction." That was old Professor McKittridge. "If the average citizen knew the potentialities of fissionable materials we wouldn't be so smug."

"I disagree." Doctor Sanbrennet always disagreed, no matter how drunk he got. In fact, the drunker he was, the more disagreeable he became. "It's biological warfare that will turn the trick. The next war will be won or lost within 24 hours. The proper use of chemical bombs planted over a widespread area in a hundred leading cities could wipe out 25 per cent of our population in a day, and another 25 per cent would probably die as a result of the universal panic. Now if we can only get to them first and do the same thing—"

"Damned government controls," said another voice at my elbow. "Ruining free enterprise. What's the man in the street need control for? Wait until next election's over—we're introducing some bills that will fix all that."

". . . but the psychiatrist told me to stop using them and switch to nembutal or something milder. I'd give anything for ten hours' sleep, simply anything, my dear!"

I felt the words bounce off my eardrums —all the gay, carefree words of wisdom so typical of the conversation of very important persons, celebrities and leading intellectuals everywhere today. Oh, it was a lovely party, thank you!

So I tried not to hear what they were saying, and gradually I succeeded. The only trouble was, I could still see them, watch what they were doing.

DURING the next half hour or so, I saw Kitty slap Doctor Sanbrenner in the face and break his glasses. I saw old Professor McKittridge shake his fist at Chester Garland. I saw Chester's wife get sick, and I saw the lady who couldn't sleep pass out on the sofa near the fireplace. I saw Rudy steer Admiral Cribber into the back room. I saw everything—including my own puzzled, frightened face in the mirror. I wondered why my face was puzzled, frightened. I also wondered just what it was doing here at all.

The room got hot and stuffy. Reek of smoke, reek of liquor, reek of breath and perspiration and talcum powder and perfume and cologne and depilatory and running mascara.

I passed another tray of drinks for Rudy and then wandered over to the window, staring out at the sky. Somewhere off in the distance, over the Potomac, a storm was gathering. I tried to imagine what it was like up there, in the coolness of the clouds. There'd be wind, and rain, and the eternal movement of the night. Yes, night after night everything was the same up there. And night after night, everything was the same down here. Down here, where I was. Where—

"The taxes keep going up year after year."

"Honestly, there's no place for children to play any more, if you insist on having the little beasts."

"But what will it matter, if only we can drop the bombs first?"

Yes, night after night, that's the way it went down here. And—

"Let's all have another drink."

It was Rudy, the life of the party. Pumping alcohol into the veins of the corpse. Trying to make it get up and dance.

Tonight, it wasn't working so well. Too many quarrels, too many complaints, too many drinks. Rudy must have sensed that, and he was anxious to make the evening a success. He had to, if he wanted that Navy contract.

I was still watching the stormclouds gather when I heard Chester Garland talking to Kitty.

"What say we all go down there? We'd still be in time for the main event."

"Go where? Nobody's going anywhere." Rudy's voice, genial but with an undercurrent of dismay.

"Sure. Let's get up a gang and go." Chester, again.

"Where?"

"To the wrestling matches, that's where. I'm tired of all this fighting—let's go watch somebody else fight for a change."

Kitty chimed in. "Sure, why not? Come on, everybody—let's see the wrestling."

There was a general babble and flurry. I could see the idea was catching on. Rudy

saw it too. Because he stepped in front of the fireplace and raised his hands and voice.

"I have a better plan," he shouted. "We'll bring the wrestlers here!"

"Here? You mean real live wrestlers in our very own front room? Hooray!" It was Chester's wife. She'd come to at the mention of strange men. "Ooh, those big hairy brutes—"

"Shut up!" Rudy suggested, with the *savoir faire* of a true host. "I mean we can bring them here with television."

"That's right," Chester agreed. "The bouts are being televised tonight. But I didn't know you had a set, Rudy."

"I haven't," Rudy improvised. "But we can get a TV set up here in twenty minutes. There's an ad in tonight's paper. They'll deliver and install a TV set, no aerial needed the minute you call the store."

"Call 'em!" That was Admiral Cribber.

"Your wish is my command," said Rudy. "It shall be done."

And it was done. We all settled back, most everybody had a drink, and Rudy made his phone arrangements in the other room. In order to pass the time of waiting, Kitty took off her shoes and did a dance, although it wasn't the sort of a dance where taking off her shoes made any difference. Professor McKittridge shook his fist at Admiral Cribber. The lady who had passed out on the sofa sat up and slapped Doctor Sanbrenner, breaking his extra pair of glasses. Rudy steered Chester Garland into the back room. Chester's wife, quite recovered, had two more Martinis and then got sick again. Oh, they managed to pass the time, all right.

I watched the freak storm. More clouds had gathered and there were a number of isolated lightning flashes, still off in the distance. Once or twice I could even hear thunder above the braying of the crowd, but there was no sign of rain in Washington proper—or improper, as the case might be.

Nobody else paid any attention to what was going on outside. The men with the television set must have knocked about five minutes before Rudy went to the door. Finally, he let them in.

The crowd let up a yelp of simulated delight as the two came in, carrying a heavy 16-inch console model.

"Right in here," Rudy said, indicating the dining room. "It'll be easier to set up chairs. How about the corner?" He went in there with the men and closed the door. The rest of the crowd got busy on a fresh tray of drinks.

"He'd better hurry." Chester Garland glanced at his watch. "It's almost eleven. We'll miss the main bout."

"I just love wrestling," said the woman who slapped faces. "Last time George and I went, there was one of them, some Indian I think it was, named Chief Thundercloud or something, and he had one of those brown torsos that was out of this world, I mean, well anyway, he broke this man's arm and you could just hear the bone go crunch, I thought I'd pass out it was so exciting, really it was."

"Did you ever see the lions at work on a bunch of Christians?" I murmured, but she didn't seem to hear me. Maybe it was just as well.

By this time everybody was herding towards the dining room. The two workmen seemed to have slipped away, and Rudy was stooping and fiddling with the controls as we came in. The lights snapped out, and in the darkness I could hear the thunder of the distant storm.

"Nice looking set—what'd they charge you?"

"What make is it?"

"Didn't they tell you how to work it? Having trouble getting the channel?"

"Here—let me show you."

Rudy ignored the queries. He stooped and fiddled, grinned drunkenly, stooped and fiddled some more. Then there came an incandescent glare from the screen and a blast of sound from the speaker.

Everybody scrambled for seats facing the screen. "Here we go," whispered Kitty.

A face filled the screen, a voice filled the room. For some reason, we all seemed to hear the voice before we saw the face. It was a sing-song voice, droning but penetrating.

". . . landing at eleven p.m. earth time . . ."

"Blah! Missed the wrestling!" That was

Chester, interrupting. Somebody said, "Quiet, there," and the voice came through again.

". . . over what is regarded as the western hemisphere of the planet."

I guess that's what the voice said. I can't be sure, for most of the words were drowned out by shouts and conversation from Rudy's guests.

They were seeing the face for the first time.

The face on the screen was like a metal mask. It showed up as gray, and might have been almost any color which would reproduce that way on television. It was an oval and contained the usual features, although the nose seemed flat. There was nothing too grotesque about it except its absolute hairlessness; the head was round and bald, and the face itself lacked eyebrows, eyelashes or hint of beard. The result was a gray, metallic sexless countenance that might have been utterly unremarkable as a mask, except for the fact that the lips moved.

And the lips of Rudy's guests moved, now—shouting in incomprehension.

Suddenly something blocked the screen. It was Admiral Cribber, getting to his feet. "Where's the phone?" he bellowed. "We're being attacked!"

"Nonsense," Rudy shouted. "It's a program. Siddown."

"But they're attacking us—"

"Wait a minute."

He waited. The face flickered out. Now the screen showed the sky. It was pinpointed, but not with stars. Moving patterns of light skyrocketed across the horizon.

The voice singsonged through. "Landings will be made shortly. There is no organized opposition. Complete control will be established immediately upon landing."

"Look!" Kitty was squealing and pointing at the screen. "Flying saucers."

"The sky gives it away," Chester Garland told her. No clouds moving. It's a studio backdrop."

"But what's it all about?" his wife wailed.

"Just one of those invasion shows. Remember Orson Welles on the radio?"

The screen showed a metropolitan skyline, pinpoints of light flickering like glowworms over the enormous concrete stalks of skyscrapers. Lightning crackled and part of the skyline disappeared.

". . . proceeding according to plan. Landings will be effected immediately. . . ."

"That's no play!" Kitty exclaimed. "Listen, you can hear the explosions."

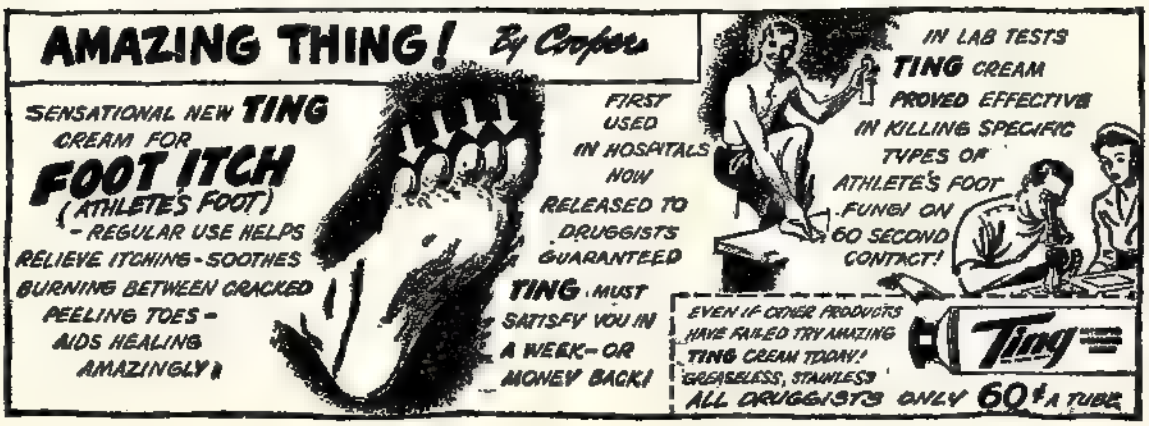
"Thunder," Rudy howled. "Can't you see there's a storm coming up? Reception is bad."

Reception *was* bad. The screen flickered again, and we caught a glimpse of the metallic mask, then of another. Thunder boomed louder, and Admiral Cribber lurched to his feet once more.

"Gotta put through a call," he said. "I still think they're attacking." He stumbled out of the room.

There was another flurry of conversation, all jumbled together, and I caught only fragments. "Norman Corwin . . . documentary . . . lot of science-fiction . . . another station . . . need a drink. . . ."

Then the roaring from the television set



drowned out all other sound, and the images came up. In one monstrous visual upheaval they spewed forth. The thunder rose.

We saw a horde of metal faces moving down an enclosed ramp that led to a city street. We saw something flicker and explode in midair.

We saw a shot of what was obviously a table-top miniature of the city of Washington, dominated by the monument. Lights played upon it momentarily and it broke in half like a stick of candy.

We saw—

"Turn it off!" snorted Chester Garland. "We need a drink!"

A half-dozen voices seconded his proposal. I added my own plea, I admit. The room was hot, steamy; thunder and darkness enveloped us, and the incessant nightmare of the television poured forth. For a moment I reflected upon its meaning. I couldn't exactly put my finger on the point, but my thoughts ran something like this:

All over the country, millions of people were sitting at their television sets, watching some paid technicians stage a lurid melodrama about the destruction of a civilization which had degenerated to the point where millions of people just sat at their television sets, watching some paid technicians stage a lurid melodrama about the destruction of a civilization which had degenerated—

And so on, over and over again. There was a hideous kind of truth buried somewhere in all this, and I tried hard to think about it coherently.

BUT it only took a moment. They were still yelling for another drink, the set was still blaring forth its explosions, a voice was still rasping, "Landings have now been made successfully at all designated points," and now Rudy was responding to the almost hysterical insistence of his guests.

"Turn the stinking thing off!"

He rose, marched up to the set, stooped and fiddled. The crowd rose and half-turned to re-enter the living room. Rudy was still stooping and fiddling, but the thunder increased in volume and tempo, and now the screen flickered forth in a scene of inferno.

A city was disintegrating before our eyes. Beams played from the pinpoints in the sky. People fled between a labyrinth of buildings. People vanished. So did the buildings. The beams played on. And the metal-faced monsters marched on metal legs, unscathed by beams. Screams rose above the thunder.

"What's the idea?" hooted Chester Garland. "Turn it off!"

Rudy stood up.

"I—I can't," he said.

"Can't?"

"No. Look." He raised one hand. It held a wire ending in a wall-plug. "I can't because it isn't turned on. It was never turned on in the first place."

"Never turned on?"

"Then what's all this we saw?"

"Is it some kind of gag?"

Abruptly, there was a crescendo of thunder and the screen went dead. Somebody snickered.

"What you trying to do, Rudy—throw a scare into us?"

"I swear the set wasn't connected."

"Blah!" Chester Garland and his wife pushed towards the door to the living room. Kitty and the others crowded after them.

"Fooled me for a minute," said Doctor Sanbrenner.

"But—" Rudy's reply was drowned by another burst of thunder. It came not from the set but from outside. The walls began to vibrate.

"There *is* a storm," said Kitty. As everyone crowded up to the bar, she walked across the room to the window. I watched her as Rudy took down a couple of fresh bottles.

"Well, soaks," he chuckled, "What'll it be? Might as well get on with the party."

I watched Kitty peer out of the window, saw her eyes widen, saw her hands grip the sill.

"The party's over," I murmured.

But nobody heard me. For suddenly, above the thunder that resounded from the streets below, Kitty began to scream.

She was still screaming as we all rushed to the window and gazed down at what was happening in the world outside.

And their bodies would die if they didn't go back to them by morning. . .

Fling the Dust Aside

BY SEABURY QUINN

WADE BARLOE looked disgustedly at the fog-swathed beach and drummed a devil's tattoo on the rail of the hotel veranda. Next to a night club at 10:30 in the morning there was no place quite so forlorn as a beach resort in foul weather, he reflected. Why the cock-eyed devil hadn't he gone up to New York with Muriel when that telegram came from Aunt Matilda?

If anyone enjoyed poor health it was his wife's old aunt who could always be depended on to stage a relapse of one of her many undefined maladies whenever her

favorite niece went for a holiday. That time they'd gone to Yellowstone . . . the old lady had been dying, judging by her telegram. Muriel had flown back to New York, and when he followed her reluctantly a week later he found the old girl chipper as a cricket on a warm hearth and vowing Muriel had hardly spent an hour with her. Now—he reached for a cigar, bit off its tip with more than necessary violence, and snapped his lighter.

Damn! Out of fluid again. He searched his pockets for a match and struck one. A little puff of sea breeze came from nowhere and extinguished the small flame as neatly as a snuffer puts a candle out. Somehow profanity seemed woefully inadequate just then, so with a sign of vexation he stepped into a dark angle of the hotel porch, hunched his shoulders to form a windshield and struck a second light.

"Oh!" The little cry, half-sob, half-terrified exclamation, startled him as an unexpected pin-prick might have done. As the blue of the first flame of the match changed to a clear yellow he saw two terrified eyes staring into his.

They were wide, startled and questioning, greenish-violet in shade, fringed with heavy lashes. Above them slim brows lifted like twin circumflexes in a mixture of surprise and fright. He supposed there was a nose beneath them and a mouth under that, but neither of these features was visible, for the owner of the eyes held a hand before her face as against a blow.

"What happened—what is it?" she gasped as the flame gathered strength. "Who—"

"Sorry!" Wade apologized as he backed away. "I didn't see you in the shadow."

The girl lowered her hand and her lips quivered as if she tried to smile. "I'm sorry, too," she told him. "I must have fallen asleep on the settee, and I was just having a bad dream—about a house afire, I think, and I was in it and couldn't get out . . ." She left the sentence hanging in midair.

HERE was an awkward situation. If he left her abruptly it would seem churlish; it would sound fatuous to repeat he was sorry he had startled her; just standing there and saying nothing would seem inane, too. "Are you all right now?" he asked, not that he had any misgivings, but merely for the sake of filling in an awkward pause.

"Oh, yes!" she spoke with what seemed more than necessary emphasis. "You see, I'd been trying to get up courage to go and hear the Guru's lecture, but somehow I lacked the nerve, so I came out here . . ." she left another sentence uncompleted.

"Oh, you mean the Mahatma?" Barloe smiled tolerantly. "The Little Bad Man from India?"

"*Is* he a Mahatma?"

"I wouldn't know. Probably he's just a faker playing hookey from a Coney Island sideshow. Why were you afraid to go in and listen to him?"

"I'm not quite sure. Somehow, this Oriental mysticism frightens me. It seems so utterly . . ."

Wade smiled in the darkness. He was getting used to her truncated sentences and had already found she could make her meaning clear without the need for rounding out her periods. At first he had not recognized her, now he placed her; the little mousy girl whose room was three doors down the corridor from his. Not exactly pretty, but not quite homely. She might have been quite attractive if she'd been willing to let herself go cosmetically. Somebody's rather frumpish secretary, or a saleslady in a quite unstylish shop, he thought, spending a whole year's hoarded savings on a two-week stay at the shore. To get a man? Her chances could not have been less if she'd attempted to go whale-fishing.

"Well," deliberately he blew the smoke away from her, "if it'll bolster your morale I'll go in with you." Just in time he kept himself from adding, "I've nothing else to do."

THE main parlor of the hotel was bright with women's evening dresses, orchid, salmon, blue and ice-green, to which the men's sports coats of Harris tweed and hound's-tooth checks were an incongruous contrast. The Pandit Vikrim Adjeet Singh was finishing his discourse as they tiptoed in and found seats by the door:

Your Christian Gospel speaks more truly than you know when it declares there is an earthly and a spiritual body. We of the East have known it for thousands of years. We know man has a physical body composed of solids, liquids and gases, and an etheric or astral body which is composed of the four subdivisions of the ether, a body formed of our desires which at the will of the Adept can leave the fleshly form and take the free, unfettered spirit to far places —a body which may live long after the decay of the gross flesh."

"Guru," a lady with a great many diamonds and wrinkles to match spoke from the rear of the hall, "how does one go about the process of—er—astralization, if that's the proper word?"

The smile the Guru bent on her was wise and secretly amused. "Dear lady, that is not for everyone to know. A little learning is a dangerous thing, as your poet has so aptly put it. Especially such learning as that. When the astral form is separated from the flesh the flesh lies dormant, to all appearances lifeless, and unless the astral form returns within a period of twenty-four hours what you call death ensues. Then the spirit wanders bodiless and homeless through the ether till the end of time."

"But, Guru," the dowager persisted, "what is the process—or is it formula?—by which the astral body is released?"

The Pandit's pointed eyebrows went up in acute angles, and his smiling mouth described a capital W. The sharp ends of his little black mustache curved upward like a pair of horns, the sharp black beard on his chin jutted forward. He looked like an amiable but nonetheless mischievous Mephistopheles. "The formula, dear lady, is a simple one. First of all, the Adept has to clear his mind of all thought. That is not so easy as it sounds. Few Easterners and practically no Westerners can do it. However, it is possible, as every Adept knows. When all worldly thoughts have been erased from the mind, so that it is a clear, unmarked page, the Adept slowly recites, *'Oom, oom, oom!'* which is the word for the Ineffable. Time after time he repeats the mystic greeting to the Infinite, breathing slowly, so that the word comes from him with all the vital principle of breath. At last the word ceases to have meaning, and gradually the world and all things mundane fade from his consciousness, then—" the small, dark man's small, dark hands spread in an all-embracing gesture—"then the spirit takes its flight and scales the Akashic heights, free from the dross of flesh, free from all the binding ties of base, material existence."

"But is there any value—and practical value—in this power?" the old lady persisted.

The Pandit gave her a hurt look. "What is practicality?" he asked, much as Pilate once asked, "What is truth?" "Suppose you have a loved one. Between you and your beloved there stretch a thousand earthly miles. You wish to know where he is, what he does, how greatly he yearns for you. If you have learned the art of astralizing you can fix your thoughts on him and in a second—in the twinkling of an eye—be with him, though all the waters of the seas and all the mountains of the earth are set between you. You can, yourself invisible, behold him in the flesh, see what he does—"

"Good God, I wouldn't want my wife to have that power!" whispered a stout, gray-haired man to a slim redhead seated cuddlesomely beside him. "If she could see me now—"

"Boy, would you ever have the process servers on your trail!" the little redhead supplied with a giggle.

"Let's get out o' this," Wade whispered to his companion. "The man's a driveling fake if ever I saw one."

The girl was gazing straight before her, eyes fixed in an almost hypnotic stare, lips parted, as if she contemplated some vision of beauty and eternal life.

He rose quietly and left her.

"Of all the balderdash I ever heard"—Barloe bent to untie his shoes—"of all the silly twaddle"—he slipped into the trousers of his pajamas—"telling a lot of silly women—" His muttering grew silent, and a grin formed at the corners of his mouth. "You wish to know how your beloved is," he seemed to hear the Pandit's silky voice. "You wish to know what she does, how much she yearns for you . . ." H'm'm.

He lay down on the bed and crossed his ankles, crossed his hands upon his chest as he had seen the hands of deceased friends disposed by the embalmer. For a long moment he lay there relaxed, mentally repeating, "Nothing—nothing—nothing!" till his brain seemed clear of thought as a freshly vacuumed rug is clear of dust. Then slowly, breathing out the syllable so softly that it sounded like a sigh, he pronounced *"Oom —oom—oom!"*

If you repeat a word often enough it loses its associative meaning and becomes just senseless sound. *Oom* hadn't meant much when he first pronounced it, after fifteen minutes' steady repetition it had no more meaning than a bird's chirp.

What kind of double-distilled assininity was this? This nonsense had gone far enough, he'd been the world's prize chump to pay attention to that faker—

HE OPENED his eyes, looked about him. How the devil had he gotten this far from the bed? He had no recollection of rising—good Lord! As peacefully as any corpse laid in its casket his body lay upon the bed, hands crossed upon its chest, eyes closed, lips parted. Of all outlandish things! He took a startled backward step and next instant found himself in the corridor. Although he had felt nothing he had passed through the locked door of his room as if it had not been there. How—what? Glancing downward he received another shock. Beneath him was the carpet of the hotel corridor, a rather worn broadloom figured in big off-pink roses on a mauve background. Right through his legs the roses of the carpet's pattern showed, not clearly, but as plainly as if viewed through a light drift of vapor. He held a foot up for inspection. The form was there, but not quite as he recalled it. Instead of being suntanned it was pale, not tallow-white, but lightly shaded, as if delicately technicolored, and somehow it seemed younger. The hardened, slightly bunching sinews of his calves were smooth and supple-seeming, like the pliant muscles of a lad.

A full-length mirror hung upon the wall some fifty feet away, and he stepped toward it briskly, then brought up with a sharp exclamation. He had no more than thought, "I must get to that looking-glass" —and he was there. A dome light in the ceiling shed a diffused glow, and in the mirror he could see the pattern of the carpet and the wallpaper reflected. But no reflection of himself. Though he stood squarely before the looking-glass it gave back no more image than if he had not been there.

". . . and I told him, 'Well, if *that's* all you want with me you can just go—' " Sharp as tinkling silver came a girl's voice raised in acid narration as two young women stepped from the elevator and made toward him. Stark panic seized him by the throat. Although he had not made a complete inspection he knew that he was unclothed, for the momentary glance he'd cast on his legs showed that the pajama trousers which had been his sole garment had not astralized when he did.

For an instant he considered flight, but before he could propel himself to the safety of his room the girls had reached him. "Yeah, an' what'd he say then?" one of them asked as she stopped before the mirror to fluff out her short blond hair, then passed on unconcernedly. She had looked right at—right through—him as she primped before the looking-glass, and had taken no more notice of him in his complete nudity than she did of the circumambient atmosphere.

So? So-o-o-o. . . .

Long windows looked out from the fifth floor corridor toward the landward side of the hotel. He walked to one of them and put a foot upon the sill. "I'd like to be in New York now," he muttered. The wish was hardly a wish, scarcely more than the shadow of a thought, but in an instant he was out the window, passing through the fog-bound air so swiftly that when he glanced across his shoulder the lights of the hotel were just a blur in the mist.

Far below him, like a luminously-glowing worm, a B. & O. express train hurried toward Jersey City, but it was just a small trail of light glimpsed in the dark a moment before vanishing. The buzzing of propellers sounded like the droning of a monster hornet several hundred feet be-

neath, and a plane that sped toward Idlewild Airport showed for a moment. Then it too was left behind.

The fog was lifting now, and as he rushed northward the setting moon left the night dim beneath the high stars. Ahead of him, so far it seemed incalculably distant, glowed a net of scintillating points of light, the window-spangled bowl that was New York.

ORIENT HOUSE, the thirty-storied apartment house that stood fortress-like beside the East River, showed half a hundred dimly lighted windows in the darkness overlooking the black, oily tide, and he dropped toward a casement which he knew looked from Aunt Mattie's bedroom. He was not conscious of an attempt to lose altitude or speed, but naturally and unthinkingly as he would have slackened pace in walking, he slowed from his rushing, wind-swept flight to a slow, easy descent, soft as the downward wafting of a feather shed by a soaring bird. A moment he poised on the stone sill, leant against the heavy plate glass of the steel-framed casement—and was inside the house.

He stood in a big, ugly room with heavy Victorian furniture, hideous with oleographic copies of such *chefs-d'oeuvre* as Landsdeer's Stag at Bay, Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair and Millet's Angelus. A blue-globed night lamp cast sufficient light for him to see the low mound formed by Aunt Mattie's desiccated old body under the bedclothes, the linen nightcap tied under her chin with two strings, and "transformation" which rested on the dressing table. Aunt Mattie slept with her mouth open, a circumstance which revealed the serviceable teeth she used at meals were masterpieces of dental technology, and at the foot of her bed slumbered Hans, the overfed and shamelessly spoiled pug-dog which was the chief companion of her latter years.

Barloe advanced a step and Hans raised heavy eyelids, sniffed fretfully, then rose as agilely as anything so obese could and turned to face him, the short hairs on his neck and shoulders rising in a hackle, and his rheumy old eyes glazed with fear. The growl he gave was more like a whine, and as he retreated a step the tremors of his back and flank muscles were visible.

"Hans!" Aunt Mattie roused and raised a high-veined old hand to pat the terrified dog. "What's the matter with my baby-boy?"

"Gr-r-r-!" muttered Hans, slinking toward his mistress. *"Gr-r-r-rf!"* In an instant he had burrowed underneath the covers, but the smothered sounds of his growls came through the blankets.

Aunt Mattie pressed a switch and twilight fled from the room as the chandelier blazed suddenly into life. She looked around, looked squarely at Barloe, then patted the small agitated mound where Hans lay shivering. "Silly boy! He's had another bad dream. No more chicken livers for him at bedtime!"

"Aunt Mattie!" Barloe whispered, but the old lady, whose hearing was abnormally keen for her age, continued looking through him, patting her whimpering pet comfortingly. "Aunt Mattie!" He spoke sharply, almost desperately, now. "Where's Muriel, Aunt Mattie?" The old lady showed no sign of having heard him.

He turned away. It didn't seem quite decent to look at the old girl in her dishabille. Muriel must be in her own room, the big room with the twin beds that Aunt Mattie kept for visiting relatives and friends. He faded through the locked door of the old lady's bed chamber, wafted down the hall to the guest room.

The beds were primly made, percale sheets turned down above chenille coverlets, pillows covered with embroidered slips. No one slept in either of them. Plainly no one had slept in them for at least twelve hours. He crossed the room to the big wardrobe, seized its knob and pulled. Nothing happened. He was powerless to move the door. Then he remembered. Leaning forward, he went through the heavy oak of the panels as if they had neither solidity nor substance. The inside of the clothespress was as virginally empty as the beds. H'm. Aunt Mattie must have made a quicker recovery than usual. Muriel was probably on her way back to the shore, and— How could she be? The last train for Stratfordshire left Jersey City at five-thirty,

and should have arrived not later than eight. It had been after that when he had listened to the Pandit's lecture; now it was well after midnight.

He stepped back into the big empty guest room, stood at gaze a moment, then, "I want to be where she is," he murmured.

THE bell-like tinkle of ice cubes against glass sounded, and a woman's delicate, light laugh came to him. He stood upon the threshold of a small, luxurious room. Before him on the polished floor there spread a lustrous Shiraz carpet, the quiet textures of damask and needlepoint complemented the patina of old, rubbed mahogany. The glow from parchment-shaded lamps illuminated the deep sofa with its brocade upholstery, the long coffee table littered with the miscellany of small, frivolous objects—old silver cigarette boxes, cloisonné ash-trays, a bronze lighter fashioned like a Grecian lamp, ultra-modern magazines and a lacquered tray set with bottles, siphons and a crystal bowl of ice cubes.

Behind the coffee table on the lounge a woman sat, a small, slight wisp of womanhood in oyster-white lounging pajamas trimmed with white fur. In one hand she held a glass of amber liquid, and the nails of her slim fingers had been lacquered copper-red from quick to tip, without half-moons. She had kicked her cross-strapped satin sandals off, and as she curled her graceful legs up under her he saw the nails of her small, pink-soled feet were varnished to match those of her hands. She was, perhaps, in her late thirties, perhaps a year or so older, and certainly she was far more charming than she had ever been at any time before, for her features were as delicately cut as those of an intaglio, with a throat-line perfect in its purity. Her short, intensely black hair was shot through with gray which she seemed to display triumphantly because it called the more attention to her small, unlined, and classically beautiful face.

She swirled the fluid in her glass and the ice in it tinkled musically. "To us, my dear," she raised the glass and took a sip.

The man who stood before her shot a stream of seltzer into his tall glass and raised it toward her. "And to you, Muriel—and Wade."

"Poor Wade," she gave a small contemptuous laugh. "He's such a stuffed shirt. Such a beastly bore. If it were not for these brief intervals I think I couldn't stand him. Why, d'ye know, I don't believe he ever was a boy—he must have cut his teeth on Blackstone and learned the Statute of Frauds instead of nursery-rhymes. I positively can't think why I ever married him!"

"Perhaps his income had something to do with it," the man commented drily.

"Oh—money! Yes, he can make money, and when he's made it can't think what to do with it. When I come into my inheritance from Aunt Mattie—"

"Don't wish the old gal in her grave too fast, kitten. She's been quite useful to us."

The woman gave a throaty little giggle. "I'll say she has. She'd be surprised to know how often she's been gravely ill and needed her dear niece for company and comfort. Last year when Wade dragged me to Yellowstone I thought I'd just die of *ennui* while I waited for your wire. You do the *nicest* jobs of forging, Maitland. I don't know what we'd do without the telegraph—no signatures to verify, no handwriting to compare, just, *'Have had a relapse and need you: Come at once. Aunt Mattie.'* It's as simple as that, isn't it?"

"H'm, yes; unless your ever-loving husband finds out."

"Oh, he'd never even suspect. He lives on such a high moral plane that he'd never think his little wife would two-time him. The poor innocent! Come and kiss me, honey-bug. I have to go back to my duty tomorrow or the day after. I daren't let Aunt Mattie be ill *too* long, you know."

Barloe felt a sudden giddiness, as if the world were spinning crazily on a loose axis. Muriel—and Maitland Hodges!

—

HE'D met Muriel seven years before when she had come to him for advice. She had been barely thirty then and he five years her senior. How it was with her he did not know, but with him it had been love at first sight. As she had said so flippantly, he had scarcely had a boyhood. Orphaned at eleven, he had been left to

exhaustion, and despite the heart-sickness that possessed him he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

A NAMELESS, formless sense of loss crowded his mind when he awakened. His life was broken into bits, and he could not reach down to pick up the pieces.

Somehow he went through the conventions of the morning, shaved, showered, dressed himself and went down to the dining room. The thought of food disgusted him, but he managed to get down a glass of orange juice and several cups of strong black coffee. Then he went into the library. Something incredible, something wholly out of his experience and beyond the bounds of possibility had happened to him last night. He didn't understand it, but he had to find out what he could about it.

He had no notion where to begin searching, but in the first volume of an encyclopedia he read:

> ASTRAL BODY—A term used by Theosophists and Eastern mystics. According to their belief the soul has two bodies, one of solid matter, one of attenuated, perhaps gaseous substance, which is sometimes able to carry the spirit away from the physical body during sleep or trance and which may survive the death of the material body.

Under ADEPT he found:

> An Adept, or Mahatma, who has acquired the power of astralization or separating his astral from his material body can sense the subtle material of the universe and can, by responding to the vibrations of Askashic records, see vividly the particular occurrence in the past to which he is attuned and also hear and to a degree feel, just as did the actors of the event which may be under consideration for review.

He shook his head bewilderedly. Dimly he sensed the import of the information he read, but just what did it really mean? Somewhere he had read that all events were photographed indelibly upon the ether, and remain a record *in perpetuum*, traveling ever outward in the limitless space of the universe, so that if a man possessed a telescope of great enough power he might look through the illimitable darkness of intersellar distance to see Henry V fight at Agincourt or Charles Martel defeat the Turks at Tours. That was all a lot of fantastic nonsense, of course, and yet . . .

HE WENT back to his room and lay down on the bed. *"Oom!"* he pronounced softly while he strove to make his mind a blank. *"Oom—oom—oom!"*

This time it did not take so long, and as he looked back at his body laying on the bed he searched his mind for some scene in the past he might view. Rome? Persia? Babylon?

Babylon . . . The air seemed suddenly warmer, almost torrid, and his eyes were dazzled by a deluge of bright sunshine. The golden light shone on an immense granite staircase flanked right and left by terra cotta figures of winged sphinxes. Down the stairs there marched a troop of men in scarlet knee-length tunics and high pointed caps, and each one blew a ram's-horn trumpet set with intricate gold inlay. The braying thunder of their music shook the atmosphere. Behind the trumpeters came a throng of women clad in fluttering veil-like draperies attached to them by gold rings in their ears and on their wrists and ankles, and after them a double rank of tall black men with jewels flashing in their purple turbans and ivory staves in their hands. Then came a company of stately, tall women with unloosed black hair falling to their feet and serving them in lieu of garments, then copper-colored girls who played on harps and little drums and dulcimers, and then a regiment of soldiers dressed in silver armor with gleaming silver shields on their left arms and long spears in their right hands.

The pageant was breath-taking in its splendor, erotic as a hashish-smoker's dream, sense-stealing as the vision of an opium-addict. Babylon the Mighty, Babylon the Glorious and Glamorous. A thousand scholars had described it from hearsay, but he had seen it; he was watching it as he might watch a parade down Fifth Avenue.

shift for himself, living unloved and unwelcomed with first one relative, then another. He worked his way through evening high school acting as a bus boy in a lunch room for his meals and a minuscule salary. At college he had waited on the students' table, been agent for a laundry, turned his hand to anything that came along.. He lectured on sightseeing buses while he studied law and graduated near the head of his class. Then came a clerkship in Moran & Morgan's office, a junior partnership, finally full membership in the firm. He'd had small chance for amusement while he grew up, no time—or money—for the amusements his classmates indulged in. It had been all work and little play till he was nearly thirty-five—then Muriel.

He had always stood a little in awe of her, for she was a gentlewoman born and reared. Her broad *a* was as natural and as unaffected as her breathing, French was a second mother-tongue to her, for she had lived in Paris till her thirteenth year. Everything she said or did was said or done with the assurance of one to the manner born, she looked like something right out of the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* or *Town & Country*.

Such social graces as he had Wade had acquired by observing others, his *savoir faire* was the result of a long trial-and-error process; even yet he felt embarrassed before the place setting of a fashionable dinner table.

She had not been slow to exploit her advantage, and though she married him and took his name and spent his money her attitude toward him had been more that of a mistress toward a faithful but slightly uncouth servant than of a wife toward her husband.

Barloe had known Maitland Hodges since schdol days. Hodges was a rich man's son who lived on the gold coast of Fraternity Row, wore good clothes, knew the right people, did the right things. Tall, blond, always immaculately groomed, his love affairs had been as numerous as they were deplorably thorough. Twice he had been named as corespondent in divorce suits. There had been "talk" of his and Muriel's friendship—or perhaps something more—before she married Barloe. But Wade had shut his ears and mind against the scandal. "She never would have married me if she had cared for him," he told himself.

Blind anger, poisonous and suppurating, flooded through him as he looked at them. A "lady," was she, a gentlewoman *sans reproche?* She wasn't even faithful to her plighted troth, or to the obligation of her food and clothes and shelter. A cur-dog taken in and fed would have shown more loyalty!

He sprang at her furiously, struck the tall whiskey-soda in her hand. The liquid bubbling in the tumbler did not even tremble. His blow had been as powerless, as ineffectual, as an exhaled breath. "Muriel!" he choked, his voice gritty with rage. He heard himself cry her name, but neither she nor Hodges took the slightest notice.

"Damn you, you can't do this to me!" he dashed at Hodges, striking with both fists. He might have been a shadow beating at the solid substance of the man he hated. For something like a minute he continued his assault, then, knowing it was useless, gave up the effort. An astral body, it seemed, was powerless against material things.

The lights of the hotel were dim against the thinning fog as he descended from the upper sky and came to rest upon the window sill outside the fifth floor corridor. He passed through the plate glass pane, dropped to the carpet of the corridor and made his way toward his room. As he paused momentarily before his door, forgetting that he needed no key for admission, he saw, or thought he saw, the fleeting flicker of a pale, slim shape before the door three rooms away from his, one of those half-perceived but not quite seen images we sometimes have the impression of discerning just before we turn our heads to find that there is really nothing there.

He had some trouble getting into his body; it seemed cold, stiff, rigid with the rigor of the newly dead, and when at last he felt he had achieved re-entry he was numbed and chilled to the marrow. There was a feeling of profound lassitude, too, as if he had been exercising to the point of

A little dancing woman flitted by, nude save for bracelets, anklets and armlets, black hair crowned with roses and floating in the breeze of her own movements, the metal bands upon her wrists and arms and ankles chiming sweetly. She cast a wanton, provocative glance at him, her red lips smiled an invitation, laughing black eyes signaled a summons . . . where had he seen such eyes, such bidding, luring lips?

He turned his back on the small, sweetly made strumpet. Muriel . . . Muriel and Maitland Hodges. There was unfinished business to be attended to.

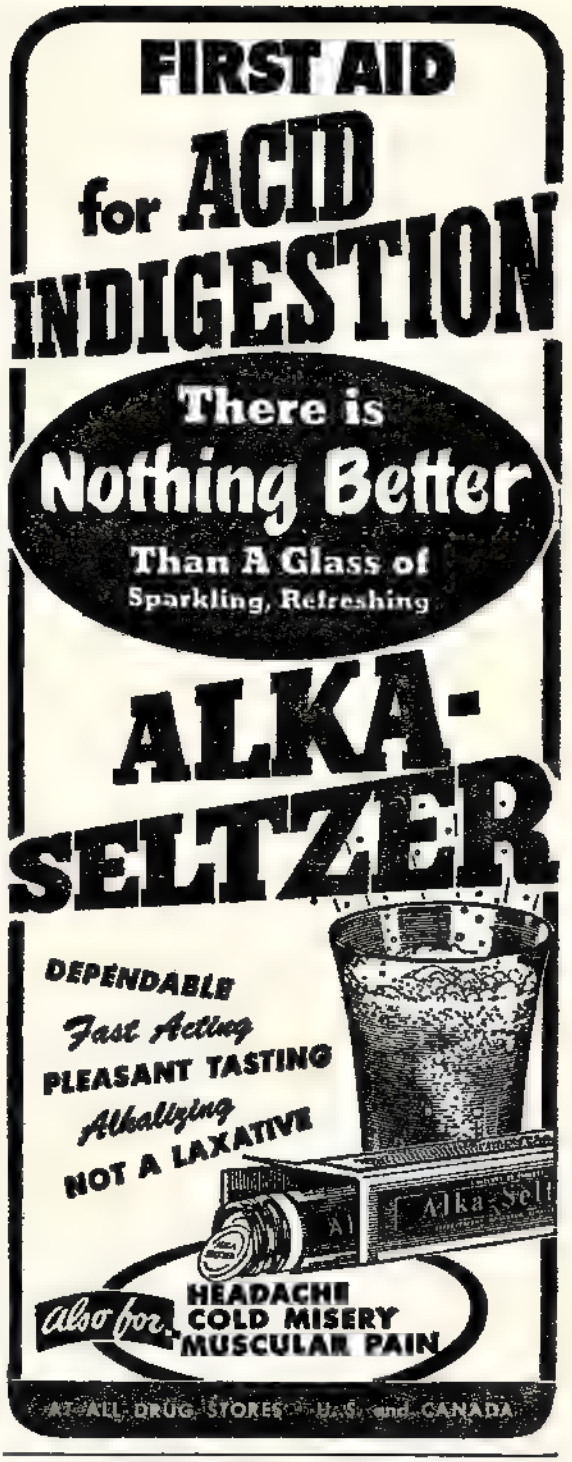
All day he wandered restlessly, like a caged beast counting its bars. A dozen schemes for vengeance he considered and discarded. His legally trained mind rejected commonplace homicide as a means of requital. He had seen too many wronged husbands go to imprisonment or the chair to think he could plead the "unwritten law" successfully. But there *must* be some way . . . some way. . . .

The answer came to him like an inspiration. His astral body was invisible, inaudible, to people in the flesh, but—Aunt Mattie's dog had flinched and cringed from him when he had astralized, had been in terror of him. And Muriel loved the old carriages in Central Park. He chuckled grimly. It was worth a trial.

THE Park was lovely in the twilight. The sky was gray as pewter and the sleepy birds made small noises in the branches. Here and there new stars peeped out and signaled one another as though messaging in code. Southward the light-jeweled towers of Manhattan thrust against the gathering dusk. The cab horse ambled lazily, head hanging down, heavy hooves almost shuffling on the smooth asphalt. Perched on the high seat of the hansom the driver dozed in somnolent content. The gent and lady down there would be his last fares today. They seemed to be that way about each other, ought to be good for a generous tip. Then he'd go down to MacSweeney's for a mug o' Guinness, maybe two, before he put old Gus in the stable and went home.

"Dear, I can't stand it," Muriel burrowed her sleek head into Maitland's tweed shoulder "When I think of going back to that *gauche*, poker-faced Puritan I feel like banging my head and screaming. If he wouldn't always be so humble, so considerate, so—so dam' *good* to me . . ."

"Take it easy, kitten," Maitland drew



her closer in the bend of his left elbow. "Your Aunt Matilda can't live much longer, and when you get your money—'Reno, here I come!' "

"But I can't stand him, I tell you. He sickens, nauseates me. If—*oh*!"

Something like a man's form, something palely tinted like a dim reflection of a watercolor in a steamy mirror, had come down to the asphalt of the Park Drive. The cabman didn't see it, nor did Muriel or Maitland, but the cab horse did. He checked his drowsy amble as if the reins had been jerked, reared on his hind legs and gave a high, frightened whinny—reared and plunged and beat the air with iron-shod hooves.

"Gus! What t'ell?" the cabman shouted, dragging at the reins with all his strength. "Gus, you crazy fool—" He plummeted from his high seat as the cab careened crazily, fell head-first to the soft grass at the roadside, and looked wonderingly after racing horse and wildly swaying vehicle. "Wot in bloody hell?" he asked the unresponsive atmosphere.

The woman clung to the man in an oestrus of terror. The pounding hooves, the madly swaying vehicle, the flapping, unheld reins that beat the frightened horse to fresh exertion . . . the helpless, hopeless feeling of confinement behind the latched doors of the hansom . . . ! "Maitland—Maitland, *do* something!"

Almost miraculously the cab escaped annihilation. Bicyclists dodged to left and right, motorists blew horns and swore and swerved aside, a policeman set spurs to his horse and galloped after it. At last, exhausted by his sudden spurt—for he was an old horse and hadn't run a hundred feet in fifteen years—Gus slackened speed, slowed from a frenzied run to a gallop, then to a sedate trot, and finally to a walk. Two minutes later he was standing by the edge of the drive, head down, sides heaving, lather drooling from his mouth.

Disappointment that was almost rage possessed Barloe. He'd counted on the frightened horse's flight to bring disaster, possibly disfigurement or death, to Muriel and Maitland. Here was anticlimax. He could frighten the cab horse again—all animals seemed terrified by astral shapes—but could he make it run away? It seemed far too exhausted. . . .

"Don't Wade, please don't!" the eager, soft voice sounded just behind him.

He whirled about. "What—?"

She stood there, nude as Praxiteles' statue of Phryne, unclothed and unashamed as Eve before she tasted of the fruit of knowledge. He looked at her, lovely in her nudity. Even her hands and feet were right, narrow, sweetly shaped, with long, tapering fingers and high, arched insteps and slim toes, the kind of hands and feet that Alessandro Botticelli loved to paint. "Wh—why," he stammered, "you're—"

"Sarah Lee, the girl you took to hear the Guru lecture."

"But you're pretty—lovely—"

"Of course," she smiled almost tolerantly. "Don't you know your thoughts can shape your astral body? I've always been so colorless, so mousy, and I've always wanted to be pretty, so . . ."

Despite himself he smiled. An uncompleted sentence again, and one that needed no completing to be clear. "What was it you asked me?"

"Don't persecute them any more. They're not worth it. If you *really* want revenge, why don't you leave them to each other?"

"You know about my—trouble?"

She nodded. "Yes, Wade. The other night when we came from the Guru's lecture I lay down on my bed and tried to astralize. At first I couldn't do it, but finally I succeeded, just in time to see you stepping from the window."

"You followed me?"

She nodded again, diffidently, almost guiltily. "Of course. Haven't you been my ideal since the first moment I saw you? You were so occupied with your thoughts you never looked behind you, and I kept almost at your elbow all the way. I saw you go into the old lady's room and frighten her fat dog out of its silly wits. I saw you go to Maitland Hodges' place and find your wife with him, and saw you try to strike them."

"But why. . . ?"

Her luminously greenish-violet eyes were steadfast in the lovely pallor of her face. "Because I love you, Wade Barloe." Before

he realized what she did she leant toward him and put her lips to his.

Their touch was lighter than the weight of a poised butterfly, but he felt it, and as naturally, as instinctively as a bird goes to its nest, he gathered her into his arms.

He could barely feel the pressure of her form on his, there was no warmth in it, and very little substance, hardly more than the light pressure of a breath, and yet . . . she seemed to melt into him, to become an integral part of him, blending her light, etheric substance with his, coalescing, commingling as one cloud does with another.

He had no words to describe the ecstatic sensation he felt. A man born blind who suddenly received his sight would have no words with which to describe his sensations at his first view of a sunrise, nor did Wade Barloe have words for the rapturous ecstasy that flooded him. He knew only that this was what he'd wanted, longed for since the hour of his birth, yet could no more envision than an earthworm could conceive the glory of the midday sun.

GENTLY, reluctantly, he put her from him, and it seeemd that he was tearing out his heart as he did so. "Sarah Lee," he gasped brokenly. "Oh, little Sarah Lee, if only I had met you sooner!"

"You have met me, my dear."

"But I'm old enough to be your father—"

"Look at yourself."

"Look at myself? How can I? No mirror will reflect—"

"Look in my eyes, dear heart; and tell me what you see reflected there."

He looked into the greenish-violet irises, and saw the image they gave back; himself as he had been twenty years earlier, a young man, vigorous with youth, with muscles that moved easily and smoothly underneath smooth, pliant skin, eyes not yet dulled from reading legal texts, or cynical from watching fellowmen's frailties.

"You see?" she asked. "Your thoughts have shaped your astral form. You'll never change unless, of course, you wish to."

Her fingertips touched his face lightly as the breeze from a moth's wings. They crept up his cheeks like the searching fingers of a blind girl. "If we don't go back to our bodies within twenty-four hours they'll die. Shall we leave them where they are—never go back?"

He laughed. The first time he had laughed naturally in years, it seemed to him.

" 'Why, if the soul can fling the dust aside,
And naked on the air of heaven ride,
Were't not a shame, were't not a shame for him
In this clay carcase crippled to abide?' "

he quoted.

"Who said that?" she asked.

"A man named Omar Khayyám."

"Omar Khayyám?" she repeated. Plainly, the name meant nothing to her.

"Yes, my dear, one of the greatest astronomers, poets and philosophers the world has ever seen. One of the greatest drunkards, too."

Her wide eyes dwelt on him in violet-green abstraction a moment. "I think that he had more sense drunk than most men do when sober," she pronounced.

"You're not the first one to say that."

She nodded thoughtfully. "No, I suppose not." Then, "Shall we leave our bodies—our 'clay carcasses'—where they are? They'll die if we don't go back to them before morning, you know."

The suggestion shocked him. It was almost like an invitation to suicide, yet—She was speaking again:

"We can leave Muriel and Maitland to each other. That's about the worst thing we can do to them . . . and we'll have each other till the end of time . . ."

He felt a sudden glow of enthusiasm. "And we'll have the whole of history to explore together," he broke in joyously. "We'll see Athens under Pericles and Rome under Augustus—the Glory that was Greece, the Grandeur that was Rome—"

She was laughing at him now. "The Glory that was Greece, the Grandeur that was Rome!" she mimicked. "Who cares about them when we have this?"

Once more she laid her mouth to his, and he felt tenderness and love and rapture such as he had never known flow from her body into his.

Pigeons from Hell

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

Frightful 'death, a whistle in the 'dark, and three women whose bodies hung in some dreadful room of horrors

I

The Whistler in the Dark

GRISWELL awoke suddenly, every nerve tingling with a premonition of imminent peril. He stared about wildly, unable at first to remember where he was, or what he was doing there. Moonlight filtered in through the dusty windows, and the great empty room with its lofty ceiling and gaping black fireplace was spectral and unfamiliar. Then as he emerged from the clinging cobwebs of his recent sleep, he remembered where he was and how he came to be there. He twisted his head and stared at his companion, sleeping on the floor near him. John Branner was but a vaguely bulking shape in the darkness that the moon scarcely grayed.

Griswell tried to remember what had awakened him. There was no sound in the

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

house, no sound outside except the mournful hoot of an owl, far away in the piny woods. Now he had captured the illusive memory. It was a dream, a nightmare so filled with dim terror that it had frightened him awake.

Recollection flooded back, vividly etching the abominable vision.

Or was it a dream? Certainly it must have been, but it had blended so curiously with recent actual events that it was difficult to know where reality left off and fantasy began.

Dreaming, he had seemed to relive his past few waking hours, in accurate detail. The dream had begun, abruptly, as he and John Branner came in sight of the house where they now lay. They had come rattling and bouncing over the stumpy, uneven old road that led through the pinelands, he and John Branner, wandering far afield from their New England home, in search of vacation pleasure. They had sighted the old house with its balustraded galleries rising amidst a wilderness of weeds and bushes, just as the sun was setting behind it. It dominated their fancy, rearing black and stark and gaunt against the low lurid rampart of sunset, barred by the black pines.

They were tired, sick of bumping and pounding all day over woodland roads. The old deserted house stimulated their imagination with its suggestion of ante-bellum splendor and ultimate decay. They left the automobile beside the rutty road, and as they went up the winding walk of crumbling bricks, almost lost in the tangle of rank growth, pigeons rose from the balustrades in a fluttering, feathery crowd and swept away with a low thunder of beating wings.

The oaken door sagged on broken hinges. Dust lay thick on the floor of the wide, dim hallway, on the broad steps of the stair that mounted up from the hall. They turned into a door opposite the landing, and entered a large room, empty, dusty, with cobwebs shining thickly in the corners. Dust lay thick over the ashes in the great fireplace.

They discussed gathering wood and building a fire, but decided against it. As the sun sank, darkness came quickly, the thick, black, absolute darkness of the pinelands. They knew that rattlesnakes and copperheads haunted Southern forests, and they did not care to go groping for firewood in the dark. They ate frugally from tins, then rolled in their blankets fully clad before the empty fireplace, and went instantly to sleep.

This, in part, was what Griswell had dreamed. He saw again the gaunt house looming stark against the crimson sunset; saw the flight of the pigeons as he and Branner came up the shattered walk. He saw the dim room in which they presently lay, and he saw the two forms that were himself and his companion, lying wrapped in their blankets on the dusty floor. Then from that point his dream altered subtly, passed out of the realm of the commonplace and became tinged with fear. He was looking into a vague, shadowy chamber, lit by the gray light of the moon which streamed in from some obscure source. For there was no window in that room. But in the gray light he saw three silent shapes that hung suspended in a row, and their stillness and their outlines woke chill horror in his soul. There was no sound, no word, but he sensed a Presence of fear and lunacy crouching in a dark corner. . . . Abruptly he was back in the dusty, high-ceilinged room, before the great fireplace.

HE WAS lying in his blankets, staring tensely through the dim door and across the shadowy hall, to where a beam of moonlight fell across the balustraded stair, some seven steps up from the landing. And there was something on the stair, a bent, misshapen, shadowy thing that never moved fully into the beam of light. But a dim yellow blur that might have been a face was turned toward him, as if *something* crouched on the stair, regarding him and his companion.

Fright crept chilly through his veins, and it was then that he awoke—if indeed he had been asleep.

He blinked his eyes. The beam of moonlight fell across the stair just as he had dreamed it did; but no figure lurked there. Yet his flesh still crawled from the fear

the dream or vision had roused in him; his legs felt as if they had been plunged in ice-water.

He made an involuntary movement to awaken his companion, when a sudden sound paralyzed him.

It was the sound of whistling on the floor above. Eery and sweet it rose, not carrying any tune, but piping shrill and melodious. Such a sound in a supposedly deserted house was alarming enough; but it was more than the fear of a physical invader that held Griswell frozen. He could not himself have defined the horror that gripped him. But Branner's blankets rustled, and Griswell saw he was sitting upright. His figure bulked dimly in the soft darkness, the head turned toward the stair as if the man were listening intently. More sweetly and more subtly evil rose that weird whistling.

"John!" whispered Griswell from dry lips. He had meant to shout—to tell Branner that there was somebody upstairs, somebody who could mean them no good; that they must leave the house at once. But his voice died dryly in his throat.

Branner had risen. His boots clumped on the floor as he moved toward the door. He stalked leisurely into the hall and made for the lower landing, merging with the shadows that clustered black about the stair.

Griswell lay incapable of movement, his mind a whirl of bewilderment. Who was that whistling upstairs? Why was Branner going up those stairs? Griswell saw him pass the spot where the moonlight rested, saw his head tilted back as if he were looking at something Griswell could not see, above and beyond the stair. But his face was like that of a sleepwalker. He moved across the bar of moonlight and vanished from Griswell's view, even as the latter tried to shout to him to come back. A ghastly whisper was the only result of his effort.

The whistling sank to a lower note, died out. Griswell heard the stairs creaking under Branner's measured tread. Now he had reached the hallway above, for Griswell heard the clump of his feet moving along it.

Suddenly the footfalls halted, and the whole night seemed to hold its breath. Then an awful scream split the stillness, and Griswell started up, echoing the cry.

The strange paralysis that had held him was broken. He took a step toward the door, then checked himself. The footfalls were resumed. Branner was coming back. He was not running. The tread was even more deliberate and measured than before. Now the stairs began to creak again. A groping hand, moving along the balustrade, came into the bar of moonlight; then another, and a ghastly thrill went through Griswell as he saw that the other hand gripped a hatchet—a hatchet which dripped blackly. *Was* that Branner who was coming down that stair?

Yes! The figure had moved into the bar of moonlight now, and Griswell recognized it.

Then he saw Branner's face, and a shriek burst from Griswell's lips. Branner's face was bloodless, corpselike; gouts of blood dripped darkly down it; his eyes were glassy and set, and blood oozed from the great gash *which cleft the crown of his head!*

GRISWELL never remembered exactly how he got out of that accursed house. Afterward he retained a mad, confused impression of smashing his way through a dusty cobwebbed window, of stumbling blindly across the weed-choked lawn, gibbering his frantic horror. He saw the black wall of the pines, and the moon floating in a blood-red mist in which there was neither sanity nor reason.

Some shred of sanity returned to him as he saw the automobile beside the road. In a world gone suddenly mad, that was an object reflecting prosaic reality; but even as he reached for the door, a dry chilling whir sounded in his ears, and he recoiled from the swaying undulating shape that arched up from its scaly coils on the driver's seat and hissed sibilantly at him, darting a forked tongue in the moonlight.

With a sob of horror he turned and fled down the road, as a man runs in a nightmare. He ran without purpose or reason. His numbed brain was incapable of conscious thought. He merely obeyed the blind

primitive urge to run—run—run until he fell exhausted.

The black walls of the pines flowed endlessly past him; so he was seized with the illusion that he was getting nowhere. But presently a sound penetrated the fog of his terror—the steady, inexorable patter of feet behind him. Turning his head, he saw *something* loping after him—wolf or dog, he could not tell which, but his eyes glowed like balls of green fire. With a gasp he increased his speed, reeled around a bend in the road, and heard a horse snort; saw it rear and heard its rider curse; saw the gleam of blue steel in the man's lifted hand.

He staggered and fell, catching at the rider's stirrup.

"For God's sake, help me!" he panted. "The thing! It killed Branner—it's coming after me! *Look!*"

Twin balls of fire gleamed in the fringe of bushes at the turn of the road. The rider swore again, and on the heels of his profanity came the smashing report of his six-shooter—again and yet again. The fire-sparks vanished, and the rider, jerking his stirrup free from Griswell's grasp, spurred his horse at the bend. Griswell staggered up, shaking in every limb. The rider was out of sight only a moment; then he came galloping back.

"Took to the brush. Timber wolf, I reckon, though I never heard of one chasin' a man before. Do you know what it was?"

Griswell could only shake his head weakly.

The rider, etched in the moonlight, looked down at him, smoking pistol still lifted in his right hand. He was a compactly-built man of medium height, and his broad-brimmed planter's hat and his boots marked him as a native of the country as definitely as Griswell's garb stamped him as a stranger.

"What's all this about, anyway?"

"I don't know," Griswell answered helplessly. "My name's Griswell. John Branner—my friend who was traveling with me—we stopped at a deserted house back down the road to spend the night. Something—" at the memory he was choked by a rush of horror. "My God!" he screamed. "I must be mad! *Something* came and looked over the balustrade of the stair—something with a yellow face! I thought I dreamed it, but it must have been real. Then somebody began whistling upstairs, and Branner rose and went up the stairs walking like a man in his sleep, or hypnotized. I heard him scream—or someone screamed; then he came down the stair again with a bloody hatchet in his hand—and my God, sir, he was *dead!* His head had been split open. I saw brains and clotted blood oozing down his face, and his face was that of a dead man.

"*But he came down the stair!* As God is my witness, John Branner was murdered in that dark upper hallway, and then his dead body came stalking down the stairs with a hatchet in its hand—to kill me!"

The rider made no reply; he sat his horse like a statue, outlined against the stars, and Griswell could not read his expression, his face shadowed by his hatbrim.

"You think I'm mad," he said hopelessly. "Perhaps I am."

"I don't know what to think," answered the rider. "If it was any house but the old Blassenville Manor—well, we'll see. My name's Buckner. I'm sheriff of this county. Took a colored man over to the county-seat in the next county and was ridin' back late."

He swung off his horse and stood beside Griswell, shorter than the lanky New Englander, but much harder knit. There was a natural manner of decision and certainty about him, and it was easy to believe that he would be a dangerous man in any sort of a fight.

"Are you afraid to go back to the house?" he asked, and Griswell shuddered, but shook his head, the dogged tenacity of Puritan ancestors asserting itself.

"The thought of facing that horror again turns me sick. But poor Branner—" he choked again. "We must find his body. My God!" he cried, unmanned by the abysmal horror of the thing; "*what* will we find? If a dead man walks, what—"

"We'll see." The sheriff caught the reins in the crook of his left elbow and began filling the empty chambers of his big blue pistol as they walked along.

AS THEY made the turn Griswell's blood was ice at the thought of what they might see lumbering up the road with bloody, grinning death-mask, but they saw only the house looming spectrally among the pines, down the road. A strong shudder shook Griswell.

"God, how *evil* that house looks, against those black pines! It looked sinister from the very first—when we went up the broken walk and saw those pigeons fly up from the porch—"

"Pigeons?" Buckner cast him a quick glance. "You saw the pigeons?"

"Why, yes! Scores of them perching on the porch railing."

They strode on for a moment in silence, before Buckner said abruptly: "I've lived in this country all my life. I've passed the old Blassenville place a thousand times, I reckon, at all hours of the day and night. But I never saw a pigeon anywhere around it, or anywhere else in these woods."

"There were scores of them," repeated Griswell, bewildered.

"I've seen men who swore they'd seen a flock of pigeons perched along the balusters just at sundown," said Buckner slowly. "Colored people, all of them except one man. A tramp. He was buildin' a fire in the yard, aimin' to camp there that night. I passed along there about dark, and he told me about the pigeons. I came back by there the next mornin'. The ashes of his fire were there, and his tin cup, and skillet where he'd fried pork, and his blankets looked like they'd been slept in. Nobody ever saw him again. That was twelve years ago. The Negroes say they can see the pigeons, but no Negro would pass along this road between sundown and sun-up. They say the pigeons are the souls of the Blassenvilles, let out of hell at sunset. The Negroes say the red glare in the west is the light from hell, because then the gates of hell are open, and the Blassenvilles fly out."

"Who were the Blassenvilles?" asked Griswell, shivering.

"They owned all this land here. French-English family. Came here from the West Indies before the Louisiana Purchase. The Civil War ruined them, like it did so many. Some were killed in the War; most of the others died out. Nobody's lived in the Manor since 1890 when Miss Elizabeth Blassenville, the last of the line, fled from the old house one night like it was a plague spot, and never came back to it—this your auto?"

They halted beside the car, and Griswell stared morbidly at the grim house. Its dusty panes were empty and blank; but they did not seem blind to him. It seemed to him that ghastly eyes were fixed hungrily on him through those darkened panes. Buckner repeated his question.

"Yes. Be careful. There's a snake on the seat—or there was."

"Not there now," grunted Buckner, tying his horse and pulling an electric torch out of the saddle-bag. "Well, let's have a look."

He strode up the broken brick-walk as matter-of-factly as if he were paying a social call on friends. Griswell followed close at his heels, his heart pounding suffocatingly. A scent of decay and moldering vegetation blew on the faint wind, and Griswell grew faint with nausea, that rose from a frantic abhorrence of these black woods, these ancient plantation houses that hid forgotten secrets of slavery and bloody pride and mysterious intrigues. He had thought of the South as a sunny, lazy land washed by soft breezes laden with spice and warm blossoms, where life ran tranquilly to the rhythm of black folk singing in sun-bathed cottonfields. But now he had discovered another, unsuspected side—a dark, brooding, fear-haunted side, and the discovery repelled him.

The oaken door sagged as it had before. The blackness of the interior was intensified by the beam of Buckner's light playing on the sill. That beam sliced through the darkness of the hallway and roved up the stair, and Griswell held his breath, clenching his fists. But no shape of lunacy leered down at them. Buckner went in, walking light as a cat, torch in one hand, gun in the other.

As he swung his light into the room across from the stairway, Griswell cried out—and cried out again, almost fainting with the intolerable sickness at what he saw. A trail of blood drops led across the floor,

crossing the blankets Branner had occupied, which lay between the door and those in which Griswell had lain. And Griswell's blankets had a terrible occupant. John Branner lay there, face down, his cleft head revealed in merciless clarity in the steady light.

His outstretched hand still gripped the haft of a hatchet, and the blade was imbedded deep in the blanket and the floor beneath, just where Griswell's head had lain when he slept there.

A MOMENTARY rush of blackness engulfed Griswell. He was not aware that he staggered, or that Buckner caught him. When he could see and hear again, he was violently sick and hung his head against the mantel, retching miserably.

Buckner turned the light full on him, making him blink. Buckner's voice came from behind the blinding radiance, the man himself unseen.

"Griswell, you've told me a yarn that's hard to believe. I saw something chasin' you, but it might have been a timber wolf, or a mad dog.

"If you're holdin' back anything, you better spill it. What you told me won't hold up in any court. You're bound to be accused of killin' your partner. I'll have to arrest you. If you'll give me the straight goods now, it'll make it easier. Now, didn't you kill this fellow, Branner?

"Wasn't it something like this: you quarreled, he grabbed a hatchet and swung at you, but you dodged and then let *him* have it?"

Griswell sank down and hid his face in his hands, his head swimming.

"Great God, man, I didn't murder John! Why, we've been friends ever since we were children in school together. I've told you the truth. I don't blame you for not believing me. But God help me, it is the truth!"

The light swung back to the gory head again, and Griswell closed his eyes.

He heard Buckner grunt.

"I believe this hatchet in his hand is the one he was killed with. Blood and brains plastered on the blade, and hairs stickin' to it—hairs exactly the same color as his. This makes it pretty tough for you, Griswell."

"How so?" the New Englander asked dully.

"Knocks any plea of self-defense in the head. Branner couldn't have swung at you with this hatchet after you split his skull with it. You must have pulled the ax out of his head, stuck it into the floor and clamped his fingers on it to make it look like he'd attacked you. And it would have been damned clever—if you'd used another hatchet."

"But I didn't kill him," groaned Griswell. "I have no intention of pleading self-defense."

"That's what puzzles me," Buckner admitted frankly, straightening. "What murderer would rig up such a crazy story as you've told me, to prove his innocence? Average killer would have told a logical yarn, at least. Hmmm! Blood drops leadin' from the door. The body was dragged—no, couldn't have been dragged. The floor isn't smeared. You must have carried it here, after killin' him in some other place. But in that case, why isn't there any blood on your clothes? Of course you could have changed clothes and washed your hands. But the fellow hasn't been dead long."

"He walked downstairs and across the room," said Griswell hopelessly. "He came to kill me. I knew he was coming to kill me when I saw him lurching down the stairs. He struck where I would have been, if I hadn't awakened. That window—I burst out at it. You see it's broken."

"I see. But if he walked then, why isn't he walkin' now?"

"I don't know! I'm too sick to think straight. I've been fearing that he'd rise up from the floor where he lies and come at me again. When I heard that wolf running up the road after me, I thought it was John chasing me—John, running through the night with his bloody ax and his bloody head, and his death-grin!"

His teeth chattered as he lived that horror over again.

Buckner let his light play across the floor.

"The blood drops lead into the hall. Come on. We'll follow them."

Griswell cringed. "They lead upstairs."

Buckner's eyes were fixed hard on him. "Are you afraid to go upstairs, with me?"

Griswell's face was gray.

"Yes. But I'm going, with you or without you. The thing that killed poor John may still be hiding up there."

"Stay behind me," ordered Buckner. "If anything jumps us, I'll take care of it. But for your own sake, I warn you that I shoot quicker than a cat jumps, and I don't often miss. If you've got any ideas of layin' me out from behind, forget them."

"Don't be a fool!" Resentment got the better of his apprehension, and this outburst seemed to reassure Buckner more than any of his protestations of innocence.

"I want to be fair," he said quietly. "I haven't indicted and condemned you in my mind already. If only half of what you're tellin' me is the truth, you've been through a hell of an experience, and I don't want to be too hard on you. But you can see how hard it is for me to believe all that you've told me."

Griswell wearily motioned for him to lead the way, unspeaking. They went out into the hall, paused at the landing. A thin string of crimson drops, distinct in the thick dust, led up the steps.

"Man's tracks in the dust," grunted Buckner. "Go slow. I've got to be sure of what I see, because we're obliteratin' them as we go up. Hmmm! One set goin' up, one comin' down. Same man. Not your tracks. Branner was a bigger man than you are. Blood drops all the way—blood on the bannisters like a man had laid his bloody hand there—a smear of stuff that looks—*brains*. Now what—"

"He walked down the stairs, a dead man," shuddered Griswell. "Groping with one hand—the other gripping the hatchet that killed him."

"Or was carried," muttered the sheriff. "But if somebody carried him—*where are the tracks?*"

THEY came out into the upper hallway, a vast, empty space of dust and shadows where time-crusted windows repelled the moonlight and the ring of Buckner's torch seemed inadequate. Griswell trembled like a leaf. Here, in darkness and horror, John Branner had died.

"Somebody whistled up here," he muttered. "John came, as if he were being called."

Buckner's eyes were blazing strangely in the light.

"The footprints lead down the hall," he muttered. "Same as on the stairs—one set going, and one coming. Same prints—*Judas!*"

Behind him Griswell stifled a cry, for he had seen what prompted Buckner's exclamation. A few feet from the head of the stairs Branner's footprints stopped abruptly, then returned, treading almost in the other tracks. And where the trail halted there was a great splash of blood on the dusty floor—and other tracks met it—tracks of bare feet, narrow but with splayed toes. They too receded in a second line from the spot.

Buckner bent over them, swearing.

"The tracks meet! And where they meet there's blood and brains on the floor! Branner must have been killed on that spot—with a blow from a hatchet. Bare feet coming out of the darkness to meet shod feet—then both turned away again; the shod feet went downstairs, the bare feet went back down the hall." He directed his light down the hall. The footprints faded into darkness, beyond the reach of the beam. On either hand the closed doors of chambers were cryptic portals of mystery.

"Suppose your crazy tale *was* true," Buckner muttered, half to himself. "These aren't your tracks. They look like a woman's. Suppose somebody did whistle, and Branner went upstairs to investigate. Suppose somebody met him here in the dark and split his head. The signs and tracks would have been, in that case, just as they really are. But if that's so, why isn't Branner lyin' here where he was killed? Could he have lived long enough to take the hatchet away from whoever killed him, and stagger downstairs with it?"

"No, no!" Recollection gagged Griswell. "I *saw* him on the stairs. He was dead. No man could live a minute after receiving such a wound."

"I believe it," muttered Buckner. "But—it's madness! Or else it's *too* clever—yet,

what sane man would think up and work out such an elaborate and utterly insane plan to escape punishment for murder, when a simple plea of self-defense would have been so much more effective? No court would recognize that story. Well, let's follow these other tracks. They lead down the hall—here, what's this?"

With an icy clutch at his soul, Griswell saw the light was beginning to grow dim.

"This battery is new," muttered Buckner, and for the first time Griswell caught an edge of fear in his voice. "Come on—out of here quick!"

The light had faded to a faint red glow. The darkness seemed straining into them, creeping with black cat-feet. Buckner retreated, pushing Griswell stumbling behind him as he walked backward, pistol cocked and lifted, down the dark hall. In the growing darkness Griswell heard what sounded like the stealthy opening of a door. And suddenly the blackness about them was vibrant with menace. Griswell knew Buckner sensed it as well as he, for the sheriff's hard body was tense and taut as a stalking panther's.

But without haste he worked his way to the stairs and backed down it, Griswell preceding him, and fighting the panic that urged him to scream and burst into mad flight. A ghastly thought brought icy sweat out on his flesh. *Suppose the dead man were creeping up the stairs behind them in the dark, face frozen in the death-grin, blood-caked hatchet lifted to strike?*

This possibility so overpowered him that he was scarcely aware when his feet struck the level of the lower hallway, and he was only then aware that the light had grown brighter as they descended, until it now gleamed with its full power—but when Buckner turned it back up the stairway, it failed to illuminate the darkness that hung like a tangible fog at the head of the stairs.

"The damn thing was conjured," muttered Buckner. "Nothin' else. It couldn't act like that naturally."

"Turn the light into the room," begged Griswell. "See if John—if John is—"

He could not put the ghastly thought into words, but Buckner understood.

He swung the beam around, and Griswell had never dreamed that the sight of the gory body of a murdered man could bring such relief.

"He's still there," grunted Buckner. "If he walked after he was killed, he hasn't walked since. But that thing—"

Again he turned the light up the stairs, and stood chewing his lip and scowling. Three times he half lifted his gun. Griswell read his mind. The sheriff was tempted to plunge back up that stairs, take his chance with the unknown. But common sense held him back.

"I wouldn't have a chance in the dark," he muttered. "And I've got a hunch the light would go out again."

He turned and faced Griswell squarely.

"There's no use dodgin' the question. There's somethin' hellish in this house, and I believe I have an inklin' of what it is. I don't believe you killed Branner. Whatever killed him is up there—now. There's a lot about your yarn that don't sound sane; but there's nothin' sane about a flashlight goin' out like this one did. I don't believe that thing upstairs is human. I never met anything I was afraid to tackle in the dark before, but I'm not goin' up there until daylight. It's not long until dawn. We'll wait for it out there on that gallery."

THE stars were already paling when they came out on the broad porch. Buckner seated himself on the balustrade, facing the door, his pistol dangling in his fingers. Griswell sat down near him and leaned back against a crumbling pillar. He shut his eyes, grateful for the faint breeze that seemed to cool his throbbing brain. He experienced a dull sense of unreality. He was a stranger in a strange land, a land that had become suddenly imbued with black horror. The shadow of the noose hovered above him, and in that dark house lay John Branner, with his butchered head—like the figments of a dream these facts spun and eddied in his brain until finally all merged in a gray twilight as sleep came uninvited to his weary soul.

He awoke to a cold white dawn and full memory of the horrors of the night. Mists curled about the stems of the pines, crawled

in smoky wisps up the broken walk. Buckner was shaking him.

"Wake up! It's daylight."

Griswell rose, wincing at the stiffness of his limbs. His face was gray and old.

"I'm ready. Let's go upstairs."

"I've already been!" Buckner's eyes burned in the early dawn. "I didn't wake you up, I went as soon as it was light. I found nothin'."

"The tracks of the bare feet—"

"Gone!"

"*Gone?*"

"Yes, gone! The dust had been disturbed all over the hall, from the point where Branner's tracks ended; swept into corners. No chance of trackin' anything there now. Something obliterated those tracks while we sat here, and I didn't hear a sound. I've gone through the whole house. Not a sign of anything."

Griswell shuddered at the thought of himself sleeping alone on the porch while Buckner was in the house conducting his exploration.

"What shall we do?" he asked listlessly. "With those tracks gone, there goes my only chance of proving my story."

"We'll take Branner's body into the county-seat," answered Buckner. "Let me do the talkin'. If the authorities knew the facts as they appear, they'd insist on you being confined and indicted. I don't believe you killed Branner—but neither a district attorney, judge nor jury would believe what you told me, or what happened to us last night.

"I'm handlin' this thing my own way. I'm not goin' to arrest you until I've exhausted every other possibility.

"Say nothin' about what's happened here, when we get to town. I'll simply tell the district attorney that John Branner was killed by a party or parties unknown, and that I'm workin' on the case.

"Are you game to come back with me to this house and spend the night here, sleepin' in that room as you and Branner slept last night?"

Griswell went white, but answered as stoutly as his ancestors might have expressed their determination to hold their cabins in the teeth of the Pequots: "I'll do it."

"Let's go then; help me pack the body out to your auto."

Griswell's soul revolted at the sight of John Branner's bloodless face in the chill white dawn, and the feel of his clammy flesh. The gray fog wrapped wispy tentacles about their feet as they carried their grisly burden across the lawn.

II

The Snake's Brother

AGAIN the shadows were lengthening over the pinelands, and again two men came bumping along the old road in a car with a New England license plate.

Buckner was driving. Griswell's nerves were too shattered for him to trust himself at the wheel. He looked gaunt and haggard, and his face was still pallid. The strain of the day spent at the county-seat was added to the horror that still rode his soul like the shadow of a black-winged vulture. He had not slept, had not tasted what he had eaten.

"I told you I'd tell you about the Blassenvilles," said Buckner. "They were proud folks, haughty, and pretty damn ruthless when they wanted their way. They didn't treat their help as well as other planters did—got their ideas in the West Indies, I reckon. There was a streak of cruelty in them—especially Miss Celia, the last one of the family to come to these parts. That was long after the slaves had been freed, but she used to whip her mulatto maid just like she was a slave, the old folks say. . . . The Negroes said when a Blassenville died, the devil was always waitin' for him out in the black pines.

"Well, after the Civil War they died off pretty fast, livin' in poverty on the plantation which was allowed to go to ruin. Finally only four girls were left, sisters, livin' in the old house and ekin' out a bare livin', with a few Negroes livin' in the old slave huts and workin' the fields on the share. They kept to themselves, bein' proud, and ashamed of their poverty. Folks wouldn't see them for months at a time. When they needed supplies they sent a Negro to town after them.

"But folks knew about it when Miss Celia came to live with them. She came from somewhere in the West Indies, where the whole family originally had its roots—a fine, handsome woman, they say, in the early thirties. But she didn't mix with folks any more than the girls did. She brought a mulatto maid with her, and the Blassenville cruelty cropped out in her treatment of this maid.

"I knew an old Negro years ago, who swore he saw Miss Celia tie this girl up to a tree, stark naked, and whip her with a horsewhip. Nobody was surprised when she disappeared. Everybody figured she'd run away, of course.

"Well, one day in the spring of 1890 Miss Elizabeth, the youngest girl, came in to town for the first time in maybe a year. She came after supplies. Said the Negroes had all left the place. Talked a little more, too, a bit wild. Said Miss Celia had gone, without leaving any word. Said her sisters thought she'd gone back to the West Indies, but she believed her aunt *was still in the house*. She didn't say what she meant. Just got her supplies and pulled out for the Manor.

"A month went past, and a Negro came into town and said that Miss Elizabeth was livin' at the Manor alone. Said her three sisters weren't there any more, that they'd left one by one without givin' any word or explanation. She didn't know where they'd gone, and was afraid to stay there alone, but didn't know where else to go. She'd never known anything but the Manor, and had neither relatives nor friends. But she was in mortal terror of *something*. The Negro said she locked herself in her room at night and kept candles burnin' all night. . . .

"It was a stormy spring night when Miss Elizabeth came tearin' into town on the one horse she owned, nearly dead from fright. She fell from her horse in the square; when she could talk she said she'd found a secret room in the Manor that had been forgotten for a hundred years. And she said that there she found her three sisters, dead, and hangin' by their necks from the ceilin'. She said *something* chased her and nearly brained her with an ax as she ran out the front door, but somehow she got to the horse and got away. She was nearly crazy with fear, and didn't know what it was that chased her—said it looked like a woman with a yellow face.

"About a hundred men rode out there, right away. They searched the house from top to bottom, but they didn't find any secret room, or the remains of the sisters. But they did find a hatchet stickin' in the doorjamb downstairs, with some of Miss Elizabeth's hairs stuck on it, just as she'd said. She wouldn't go back there and show them how to find the secret door; almost went crazy when they suggested it.

"When she was able to travel, the people made up some money and loaned it to her—she was still too proud to accept charity—and she went to California. She never came back, but later it was learned, when she sent back to repay the money they'd loaned her, that she'd married out there.

"Nobody ever bought the house. It stood there just as she'd left it, and as the years passed folks stole all the furnishings out of it, poor white trash, I reckon. A Negro wouldn't go about it. But they came after sun-up and left there long before sundown."

"WHAT did the people think about Miss Elizabeth's story?" asked Griswell.

"Well, most folks thought she'd gone a little crazy, livin' in that old house alone. But some people believed that mulatto girl, Joan, didn't run away, after all. They believed she'd hidden in the woods, and glutted her hatred of the Blassenvilles by murderin' Miss Celia and the three girls. They beat up the woods with bloodhounds, but never found a trace of her. If there was a secret room in the house, she might have been hidin' there—if there was anything to that theory."

"She couldn't have been hiding there all these years," muttered Griswell. "Anyway, the thing in the house now isn't human."

Buckner wrenched the wheel around and turned into a dim trace that left the main road and meandered off through the pines.

"Where you going?"

"There's an old Negro that lives off this way a few miles. I want to talk to him. We're up against something that takes more than white man's sense. The black people

know more than we do about some things. This old man is nearly a hundred years old. His master educated him when he was a boy, and after he was freed he traveled more extensively than most white men do. They say he's a voodoo man."

Griswell shivered at the phrase, staring uneasily at the green forest walls that shut them in. The scent of the pines was mingled with the odors of unfamiliar plants and blossoms. But underlying all was a reek of rot and decay. Again a sick abhorrence of these dark mysterious woodlands almost overpowered him.

"Voodoo!" he muttered. "I'd forgotten about that—I never could think of black magic in connection with the South. To me witchcraft was always associated with old crooked streets in waterfront towns, overhung by gabled roofs that were old when they were hanging witches in Salem; dark musty alleys where black cats and other things might steal at night. Witchcraft always meant the old towns of New England, to me—but all this is more terrible than any New England legend—these somber pines, old deserted houses, lost plantations, mysterious black people, old tales of madness and horror—God, what frightful, ancient terrors there are on this continent fools call 'young'!"

"Here's old Jacob's hut," announced Buckner, bringing the automobile to a halt.

Griswell saw a clearing and a small cabin squatting under the shadows of the huge trees. There pines gave way to oaks and cypresses, bearded with gray trailing moss, and behind the cabin lay the edge of a swamp that ran away under the dimness of the trees, choked with rank vegetation. A thin wisp of blue smoke curled up from the stick-and-mud chimney.

He followed Buckner to the tiny stoop, where the sheriff pushed open the leather-hinged door and strode in. Griswell blinked in the comparative dimness of the interior. A single small window let in a little daylight. An old Negro crouched beside the hearth, watching a pot stew over the open fire.

He looked up as they entered, but did not rise. He seemed incredibly old. His face was a mass of wrinkles, and his eyes, dark and vital, were filmed momentarily at times as if his mind wandered.

Buckner motioned Griswell to sit down in a string-bottomed chair, and himself took a crudely-made bench near the hearth, facing the old man.

"Jacob," he said bluntly, "the time's come for you to talk. I know you know the secret of Blassenville Manor. I've never questioned you about it, because it wasn't in my line. But a man was murdered there last night, and this man here may hang for it, unless you tell me what haunts that old house of the Blassenvilles."

The old man's eyes gleamed, then grew misty as if clouds of extreme age drifted across his brittle mind.

"The Blassenvilles," he murmured, and his voice was mellow and rich, his speech not the patois of the piny woods darky. "They were proud people, sirs—proud and cruel. Some died in the war, some were killed in duels—the men-folks, sirs. Some died in the Manor—the old Manor—" His voice trailed off into unintelligible mumblings.

"What of the Manor?" asked Buckner patiently.

"Miss Celia was the proudest of them all," the old man muttered. "The proudest and the cruelest. The black people hated her; Joan most of all. Joan had white blood in her, and she was proud, too. Miss Celia whipped her like a slave."

"What is the secret of Blassenville Manor?" persisted Buckner.

THE film faded from the old man's eyes; they were dark as moonlit wells.

"What secret, sir? I do not understand."

"Yes, you do. For years that old house has stood there with its mystery. You know the key to its riddle."

The old man stirred the stew. He seemed perfectly rational now.

"Sir, life is sweet, even to an old black man."

"You mean somebody would kill you if you told me?"

But the old man was mumbling again, his eyes clouded.

"Not somebody. No human. No human

being. The black gods of the swamps. My secret is inviolate, guarded by the Big Serpent, the god above all gods. He would send a little brother to kiss me with his cold lips —a little brother with a white crescent moon on his head. I sold my soul to the Big Serpent when he made me maker of *zuvembies—"*

Buckner stiffened.

"I heard that word once before," he said softly, "from the lips of a dying black man, when I was a child. What does it mean?"

Fear filled the eyes of old Jacob.

"What have I said? No—no! I said nothing."

"Zuvembies," prompted Buckner.

"Zuvembies," mechanically repeated the old man, his eyes vacant. "A *zuvembie* was once a woman—on the Slave Coast they know of them. The drums that whisper by night in the hills of Haiti tell of them. The makers of *zuvembies* are honored of the people of Damballah.

"It is death to speak of it to a white man—it is one of the Snake God's forbidden secrets."

"YOU speak of the *zuvembies,"* said Buckner softly.

"I must not speak of it," mumbled the old man, and Griswell realized that he was thinking aloud, too far gone in his dotage to be aware that he was speaking at all. "No white man must know that I danced in the Black Ceremony of the voodoo, and was made a maker of *zombies* and *zuvembies.* The Big Snake punishes loose tongues with death."

"A *zuvembie* is a woman?" prompted Buckner.

"Was a woman," the old Negro muttered. *"She* knew I was a maker of *zuvembies*— she came and stood in my hut and asked for the awful brew—the brew of ground snakebones, and the blood of vampire bats, and the dew from a night-hawk's wings, and other elements unnameable. She had danced in the Black Ceremony—she was ripe to become a *zuvembie*—the Black Brew was all that was needed—the other was beautiful—I could not refuse her."

"Who?" demanded Buckner tensely, but the old man's head was sunk on his withered breast, and he did not reply. He seemed to slumber as he sat. Buckner shook him. "You gave a brew to make a woman a *zuvembie*— what is a *zuvembie?"*

The old man stirred resentfully and muttered drowsily.

"A *zuvembie* is no longer human. It knows neither relatives nor friends. It is one with the people of the Black World. It commands the natural demons—owls, bats snakes and werewolves, and can fetch darkness to blot out a little light. It can be slain by lead or steel, but unless it is slain thus, it lives forever, and it eats no such food as humans eat. It dwells like a bat in a cave or an old house. Time means naught to the *zuvembie;* an hour, a day, a year, all is one. It cannot speak human words, nor think as a human thinks, but it can hypnotize the living by the sound of its voice, and when it slays a man it can command his lifeless body until the flesh is cold. As long as the blood flows, the corpse is its slave. Its pleasure lies in the slaughter of human beings."

"And why should one become a *zuvembie?"* asked Buckner softly.

"Hate," whispered the old man. "Hate! Revenge!"

"Was her name Joan?" murmured Buckner.

IT WAS as if the name penetrated the fogs of senility that clouded the voodooman's mind.

He shook himself and the film faded from his eyes, leaving them hard and gleaming as wet black marble.

"Joan?" he said slowly. "I have not heard that name for the span of a generation. I seem to have been sleeping, gentlemen; I do not remember—I ask your pardon. Old men fall asleep before the fire, like old dogs. You asked me of Blassenville Manor? Sir, if I were to tell you why I cannot answer you, you would deem it mere superstition. Yet the white man's God be my witness—"

As he spoke he was reaching across the hearth for a piece of firewood, groping among the heaps of sticks there. And his voice broke in a scream, as he jerked back his arm convulsively. And a horrible, thrashing, trailing *thing* came with it. Around the

voodoo-man's arm a mottled length of that shape was wrapped, and a wicked wedge-shaped head struck again in silent fury.

The old man fell on the hearth, screaming, upsetting the simmering pot and scattering the embers, and then Buckner caught up a billet of firewood and crushed that flat head. Cursing, he kicked aside the knotting, twisting trunk, glaring briefly at the mangled head.

Old Jacob had ceased screaming and writhing; he lay still, staring glassily upward.

"Dead?" whispered Griswell.

"Dead as Judas Iscariot," snapped Buckner, frowning at the twitching reptile. "That infernal snake crammed enough poison into his veins to kill a dozen men his age. But I think it was the shock and fright that killed him."

"What shall we do?" asked Griswell, shivering.

"Leave the body on that bunk. Nothin' can hurt it, if we bolt the door so the wild hogs can't get in, or any cat. We'll carry it into town tomorrow. We've got work to do tonight. Let's get goin'."

Griswell shrank from touching the corpse, but he helped Buckner lift it on the rude bunk, and then stumbled hastily out of the hut. The sun was hovering above the horizon, visible in dazzling red flame through the black stems of the trees.

They climbed into the car in silence, and went bumping back along the stumpy train.

"He said the Big Snake would send one of his brothers," muttered Griswell.

"Nonsense!" snorted Buckner. "Snakes like warmth, and that swamp is full of them. It crawled in and coiled up among that firewood. Old Jacob disturbed it, and it bit him. Nothin' supernatural about that." After a short silence he said, in a different voice, "That was the first time I ever saw a rattler strike without singin'; and the first time I ever saw a snake *with a white crescent moon on its head.*"

They were turning in to the main road before either spoke again.

"You think that the mulatto Joan has skulked in the house all these years?" Griswell asked.

"You heard what old Jacob said," answered Buckner grimly. "Time means nothin' to a *zuvembie.*"

As they made the last turn in the road, Griswell braced himself against the sight of Blassenville Manor looming black against the red sunset. When it came into view he bit his lip to keep from shrieking. The suggestion of cryptic horror came back in all its power.

"Look!" he whispered from dry lips as they came to a halt beside the road. Buckner grunted.

From the balustrades of the gallery rose a whirling cloud of pigeons that swept away into the sunset, black against the lurid glare. . . .

III

The Call of Zuvembie

BOTH men sat rigid for a few moments after the pigeons had flown.

"Well, I've seen them at last," muttered Buckner.

"Only the doomed see them, perhaps," whispered Griswell. "That tramp saw them—"

"Well, we'll see," returned the Southerner tranquilly, as he climbed out of the car, but Griswell noticed that he unconsciously hitched forward his scabbarded gun.

The oaken door sagged on broken hinges. Their feet echoed on the broken brick walk. The blind windows reflected the sunset in sheets of flame. As they came into the broad hall Griswell saw the string of black marks that ran across the floor and into the chamber, marking the path of a dead man.

Buckner had brought blankets out of the automobile. He spread them before the fireplace.

"I'll lie next to the door," he said. "You lie where you did last night."

"Shall we light a fire in the grate?" asked Griswell, dreading the thought of the blackness that would cloak the woods when the brief twilight had died.

"No. You've got a flashlight and so have I. We'll lie here in the dark and see what

happens. Can you use that gun I gave you?"

"I suppose so. I never fired a revolver, but I know how it's done."

"Well, leave the shootin' to me, if possible." The sheriff seated himself cross-legged on his blankets and emptied the cylinder of his big blue Colt, inspecting each cartridge with a critical eye before he replaced it.

Griswell prowled nervously back and forth, begrudging the slow fading of the light as a miser begrudges the waning of his gold. He leaned with one hand against the mantelpiece, staring down into the dust-covered ashes. The fire that produced those ashes must have been built by Elizabeth Blassenville, more than forty years before. The thought was depressing. Idly he stirred the dusty ashes with his toe. Something came to view among the charred debris—a bit of paper, stained and yellowed. Still idly he bent and drew it out of the ashes. It was a note-book with moldering cardboard backs.

"What have you found?" asked Buckner, squinting down the gleaming barrel of his gun.

"Nothing but an old note-book. Looks like a diary. The pages are covered with writing—but the ink is so faded, and the paper is in such a state of decay that I can't tell much about it. How do you suppose it came in the fireplace, without being burned up?"

"Thrown in long after the fire was out," surmised Buckner. "Probably found and tossed in the fireplace by somebody who was in here stealin' furniture. Likely somebody who couldn't read."

GRISWELL fluttered the crumbling leaves listlessly, straining his eyes in the fading light over the yellowed scrawls. Then he stiffened.

"Here's an entry that's legible! Listen!" He read:

" 'I know someone is in the house besides myself. I can hear someone prowling about at night when the sun has set and the pines are black outside. Often in the night I hear *it* fumbling at my door. *Who* is it? Is it one of my sisters? Is it Aunt Celia? If it is either of these, why does she steal so subtly about the house? Why does she tug at my door, and glide away when I call to her? Shall I open the door and go out to her? No, no! I dare not! I am afraid. Oh God, what shall I do? I dare not stay here—but where am I to go?' "

"By God!" ejaculated Buckner. "That must be Elizabeth Blassenville's diary! Go on!"

"I can't make out the rest of the page," answered Griswell. "But a few pages further on I can make out some lines." He read:

" 'Why did the Negroes all run away when Aunt Celia disappeared? My sisters are dead. I know they are dead. I seem to sense that they died horribly, in fear and agony. But why? *Why?* If someone murdered Aunt Celia, why should that person murder my poor sisters? They were always kind to the black people. Joan—' " He paused, scowling futilely.

"A piece of the page is torn out. Here's another entry under another date—at least I judge it's a date; I can't make it out for sure.

" '——the awful thing that the old Negress hinted at? She named Jacob Blount, and Joan, but she would not speak plainly; perhaps she feared to—' Part of it gone here; then:

" 'No, no! How can it be? *She* is dead—or gone away. Yet—she was born and raised in the West Indies, and from hints she let fall in the past, I know she delved into the mysteries of the voodoo. I believe she even danced in one of their horrible ceremonies—how could she have been such a beast? And this—this horror. God, can such things be? I know not what to think. If it is *she* who roams the house at night, who fumbles at my door, who *whistles* so weirdly and sweetly—no, no, I must be going mad. If I stay here alone I shall die as hideously as my sisters must have died. Of that I am convinced.' "

THE incoherent chronicle ended as abruptly as it had begun. Griswell was so engrossed in deciphering the scraps that he was not aware that darkness had stolen upon them, hardly aware that Buckner was

holding his electric torch for him to read by. Waking from his abstraction he started and darted a quick glance at the black hallway.

"What do you make of it?"

"What I've suspected all the time," answered Buckner. "That mulatto maid Joan turned *zuvembie* to avenge herself on Miss Celia. Probably hated the whole family as much as she did her mistress. She'd taken part in voodoo ceremonies on her native island until she was 'ripe,' as old Jacob said. All she needed was the Black Brew—he supplied that. She killed Miss Celia and the three older girls, and would have gotten Elizabeth but for chance. She's been lurkin' in this old house all these years, like a snake in a ruin."

"But why should she murder a stranger?"

"You heard what old Jacob said," reminded Buckner. "A *zuvembie* finds satisfaction in the slaughter of humans. She called Branner up the stair and split his head and stuck the hatchet in his hand, and sent him downstairs to murder you. No court will ever believe that, but if we can produce her body, that will be evidence enough to prove your innocence. My word will be taken, that she murdered Branner. Jacob said a *zuvembie* could be killed . . . in reporting this affair I don't have to be too accurate in detail."

"She came and peered over the balustrade of the stair at us," muttered Griswell. "But why didn't we find her tracks on the stair?"

"Maybe you dreamed it. Maybe a *zuvembie* can project her spirit—hell! why try to rationalize something that's outside the bounds of rationality? Let's begin our watch."

"Don't turn out the light!" exclaimed Griswell involuntarily. Then he added: "Of course. Turn it out. We must be in the dark as"—he gagged a bit—"as Branner and I were."

But fear like a physical sickness assailed him when the room was plunged in darkness. He lay trembling and his heart beat so heavily he felt as if he would suffocate.

"The West Indies must be the plague spot of the world," muttered Buckner, a blur on his blankets. "I've heard of *zombies*. Never knew before what a *zuvembie* was. Evidently some drug concocted by the voodoo-men to induce madness in women. That doesn't explain the other things, though: the hypnotic powers, the abnormal longevity, the ability to control corpses—no, a *zuvembie* can't be merely a madwoman.

"It's a monster, something more and less than a human being, created by the magic that spawns in black swamps and jungles—well, we'll see."

HIS voice ceased, and in the silence Griswell heard the pounding of his own heart.

Outside in the black woods a wolf howled eerily, and owls hooted. Then silence fell again like a black fog.

Griswell forced himself to lie still on his blankets. Time seemed at a standstill. He felt as if he were choking. The suspense was growing unendurable; the effort he made to control his crumbling nerves bathed his limbs in sweat. He clenched his teeth until his jaws ached and almost locked, and the nails of his fingers bit deeply into his palms.

He did not know what he was expecting. The fiend would strike again—but how? Would it be a horrible, sweet whistling, bare feet stealing down the creaking steps, or a sudden hatchet-stroke in the dark? Would it choose him or Buckner? *Was Buckner already dead?* He could see nothing in the blackness, but he heard the man's steady breathing. The Southerner must have nerves of steel. Or was that Buckner breathing beside him, separated by a narrow strip of darkness? Had the fiend already struck in silence, and taken the sheriff's place, there to lie in ghoulish glee until it was ready to strike?—a thousand hideous fancies assailed Griswell tooth and claw.

He began to feel that he would go mad if he did not leap to his feet, screaming, and burst frenziedly out of that accursed house—not even the fear of the gallows could keep him lying there in the darkness any longer—the rhythm of Buckner's breathing was suddenly broken, and Gris-

well felt as if a bucket of ice-water had been poured over him. From somewhere above them rose a sound of weird, sweet whistling. . . .

Griswell's control snapped, plunging his brain into darkness deeper than the physical blackness which engulfed him. There was a period of absolute blankness, in which a realization of *motion* was his first sensation of awakening consciousness. He was running, madly, stumbling over an incredibly rough road. All was darkness about him, and he ran blindly. Vaguely he realized that he must have bolted from the house, and fled for perhaps miles before his overwrought brain began to function. He did not care; dying on the gallows for a murder he never committed did not terrify him half as much as the thought of returning to that house of horror. He was overpowered by the urge to run—run—run as he was running now, blindly, until he reached the end of his endurance. The mist had not yet fully lifted from his brain, but he was aware of a dull wonder that he could not see the stars through the black branches. He wished vaguely that he could see where he was going.

He believed he must be climbing a hill, and that was strange, for he knew there were no hills within miles of the Manor.

Then above and ahead of him a dim glow began.

HE SCRAMBLED toward it, over ledge-like projections that were more and more taking on a disquieting symmetry. Then he was horror-stricken to realize that a sound was impacting on his ears—*a weird mocking whistle.* The sound swept the mists away. Why, what was this? *Where was he?* Awakening and realization came like the stunning stroke of a butcher's maul. He was not fleeing along a road, or climbing a hill; he was mounting a stair. He was still in Blassenville Manor! *And he was climbing the stair!*

An inhuman scream burst from his lips. Above it the mad whistling rose in a ghoulish piping of demoniac triumph. He tried to stop—to turn back—even to fling himself over the balustrade. His shrieking rang unbearably in his own ears. But his will-power was shattered to bits. It did not exist. He had no will. He had dropped his flashlight, and he had forgotten the gun in his pocket. He could not command his own body.

His legs, moving stiffly, worked like pieces of mechanism detached from his brain, obeying an outside will. Clumping methodically they carried him shrieking up the stair toward the witch-fire glow shimmering above him.

"Buckner!" he screamed. "Buckner! Help, for God's sake!"

His voice strangled in his throat. He had reached the upper landing. He was tottering down the hallway. The whistling sank and ceased, but its impulsion still drove him on. He could not see from what source the dim glow came. It seemed to emanate from no central focus. But he saw a vague figure shambling toward him. It looked like a woman, but no human woman ever walked with that skulking gait, and no human woman ever had that face of horror, that leering yellow blur of lunacy—he tried to scream at the sight of that face, at the glint of keen steel in the uplifted claw-like hand—but his tongue was frozen.

Then something crashed deafeningly behind him; the shadows were split by a tongue of flame which lit a hideous figure falling backward. Hard on the heels of the report rang an inhuman squawk.

In the darkness that followed the flash Griswell fell to his knees and covered his face with his hands. He did not hear Buckner's voice.

The Southerner's hand on his shoulder shook him out of his swoon.

A light in his eyes blinded him. He blinked, shaded his eyes, looked up into Buckner's face, bending at the rim of the circle of light. The sheriff was pale.

"Are you hurt? God, man, are you hurt? There's a butcher knife there on the floor—"

"I'm not hurt," mumbled Griswell. "You fired just in time—the fiend! Where is it? Where did it go?"

"Listen!"

Somewhere in the house there sounded a sickening flopping and flapping as of

something that thrashed and struggled in its death convulsions.

"Jacob was right," said Buckner grimly. "Lead can kill them. I hit her, all right. Didn't dare use my flashlight, but there was enough light. When that whistlin' started you almost walked over me gettin' out. I knew you were hypnotized, or whatever it is. I followed you up the stairs. I was right behind you, but crouchin' low so she wouldn't see me, and maybe get away again. I almost waited too long before I fired—but the sight of her almost paralyzed me. Look!"

He flashed his light down the hall, and now it shone bright and clear. And it shone on an aperture gaping in the wall where no door had showed before.

"The secret panel Miss Elizabeth found!" Buckner snapped. "Come on!"

He ran across the hallway and Griswell followed him dazedly. The flopping and thrashing came from beyond that mysterious door, and now the sounds had ceased.

THE light revealed a narrow, tunnel-like corridor that evidently led through one of the thick walls. Buckner plunged into it without hesitation.

"Maybe it couldn't think like a human," he muttered, shining his light ahead of him. "But it had sense enough to erase its tracks last night so we couldn't trail it to that point in the wall and maybe find the secret panel. There's a room ahead—the secret room of the Blassenvilles!"

And Griswell cried out: "My God! It's the windowless chamber I saw in my dream, with the three bodies hanging—ahhhhh!"

Buckner's light playing about the circular chamber became suddenly motionless. In that wide ring of light three figures appeared, three dried, shriveled, mummy-like shapes, still clad in the moldering garments of the last century. Their slippers were clear of the floor as they hung by their withered necks from chains suspended from the ceiling.

"The three Blassenville sisters!" muttered Buckner. "Miss Elizabeth wasn't crazy, after all."

"Look!" Griswell could barely make his voice intelligible. "There—over there in the corner!"

The light moved, halted.

"Was that thing a woman once?" whispered Griswell. "God, look at that face, even in death. Look at those claw-like hands, with black talons like those of a beast. Yes, it was human, though—even the rags of an old ballroom gown.

"Why should a mulatto maid wear such a dress, I wonder?"

"This has been her lair for over forty years," muttered Buckner, brooding over the grinning grisly thing sprawling in the corner. "This clears you, Griswell—a crazy woman with a hatchet—that's all the authorities need to know. God, what a revenge!—what a foul revenge! Yet what a bestial nature she must have had, in the beginnin', to delve into voodoo as she must have done—"

"The mulatto woman?" whispered Griswell, dimly sensing a horror that overshadowed all the rest of the terror.

Buckner shook his head. "We misunderstood old Jacob's maunderin's, and the things Miss Elizabeth wrote—*she* must have known, but family pride sealed her lips. Griswell, I understand now; the mulatto woman had her revenge, but not as we'd supposed. She didn't drink the Black Brew old Jacob fixed for her. It was for somebody else, to be given secretly in her food, or coffee, no doubt. Then Joan ran away, leavin' the seeds of the hell she'd sowed to grow."

"That—that's not the mulatto woman?" whispered Griswell.

"When I saw her out there in the hallway I knew she was no mulatto. And those distorted features still reflect a family likeness. I've seen her portrait, and I can't be mistaken. There lies the creature that was once Celia Blassenville."

"The Baronets of Mertonbridge Hall do not murder their wives," said the butler. Did he know what he was talking about?

Was It Murder?

BY H. C. McNEILE

Heading by Fred Humiston

I DO not profess to explain what I am going to set down. I hold no positive opinion on things psychic, one way or the other. Men of unassailable integrity have given the world their experience on such matters, which are open for all to read, and my contribution can add nothing to the wealth of material already collected. Nevertheless, for what it is worth, I am committing it to paper. I do it for my own satisfaction only: For reasons which will be obvious, these words must never see the light of day in print. Because they either tell of a coincidence so amazing as to be well-nigh incredible or else Sir Bryan Mertonbridge, sixteenth Baronet, of Mertonbridge Hall, Sussex, is a cold-blooded murderer. And, since his house-parties for Goodwood are famous throughout the county it were madness for a humble bank manager to bring such an accusation against him, when proof is impossible.

It happened four years ago, but let it not be thought that time has clouded my memory. The incidents of that night in June are as clear in my mind as if they had occurred yesterday. Sometimes I wake now with the woman's last dying scream ringing in my ears, and, jumping out of bed, I pace up and down my room, asking myself again and again the same old question. Was it a coincidence or was it not?

THE sea mist started to blow over the Downs about eight o'clock on the evening when it took place. It came like a dense white wall, blotting out the surrounding landscape, and covering the wind-screen with a film of moisture more difficult to see through than heavy rain. My destination was Brighton, but, never dreaming that such a mist would come down on me, I had left the main coast road, and had taken a narrow inland one that wound along the foot of the Downs, connecting up a few scattered farms and hamlets that still escaped the daily ordeal of the charge of the motor heavy brigade. The road was good but narrow, with a ditch on each side, so that caution was necessary owing to the

mist making the grass slippery. The trouble, however, was the bad visibility, and, after a time, my rate of progress was reduced to less than ten miles an hour. Another difficulty was due to indifferent signposting, the few that there were showing only the next village and no large town.

I had been creeping along for about a quarter of an hour when I came to four cross-roads, and, getting out of the car, I approached the signpost, one arm of which fortunately indicated Worthing. Once on the main road, things might be better, so I decided to take it. But having slightly overshot the mark, I had to back the car and it was then the mishap occurred. I reversed too far, and the back wheels skidded into the ditch.

At first I thought nothing of it, but after repeated attempts to get her out, which only resulted in the wheels spinning round, I began to grow uneasy. And then came the final blow. There was a sharp click, and the wheels ceased to move, though the engine was still running in gear. Either the cardan shaft, or one arm of the back axle, had broken. The car was helpless: it was now a question of being towed out.

I lit a cigarette and sized up the position. My map was a small-scale one, embracing the whole of England, and I knew the cross-roads where I was would not be marked. The light was failing rapidly: worse still, the sea mist was beginning to turn into genuine rain. My chances of finding a garage, even if I knew where to look for one, which could send out a breakdown gang at that hour, were remote. In fact, it was evident that the car would have to remain where it was till the morning. But I failed to see why I should keep it company. Sooner or later, I must come to some habitation of sorts, where I could be directed to an inn, or whose owner would perhaps put me up for the night. Anyway, I could not stop where I was, so leaving the car in the ditch, I took the road for Worthing.

FOR twenty minutes I trudged along without meeting a soul or seeing the sign of a house. The rain was now pouring down, and, having no mackintosh, I was rapidly becoming wet to the skin. And then, just as I was beginning to despair of finding anything, the road swerved sharply to the right, and I saw a pair of heavy iron gates in front of me. Beyond them was a small house—evidently the lodge to some big property.

It was in complete darkness, but at least it was something made of bricks and mortar, and, pushing open one of the gates, I approached it and knocked on the door. There was no answer, and, after a while, I realized it was empty. I went all round it in the hope of finding a window unlatched. Everything was tight shut; short of breaking a pane, there was no hope of getting in.

By that time the water was squelching in my shoes, and I was seriously cogitating as to whether it would not be worth while to smash a window, when it struck me that, if this was a lodge, the big house must be fairly close at hand. So once again I started off up the drive: no one could refuse a dog shelter on such a night.

It was almost dark, and, save for my footsteps on the gravel and the mournful dripping of the water from the trees, no sound broke the silence. Was I never going to reach the house?

At length the trees bordering the drive stopped abruptly, and there loomed up ahead of me the outlines of a large mansion. But even as I quickened my pace, my heart began to sink, for, just as at the lodge, I could see no light in any window. Surely, I reflected, this could not be empty, too.

I FOUND the front door. It was of oak, studded with iron bolts, and, by the light of a match, I saw a heavy, old-fashioned bell-pull. For a few moments I hesitated; then, taking my courage in both hands, I gave it a sharp pull, only to jump nearly out of my skin the next second. For the bell rang just above my head, and the noise was deafening. Gradually it died away, and, in the silence that followed, I listened intently. If there was anyone in the house, surely they must have heard it; to me the row had seemed enough to wake the dead. But the minutes passed, and no one came. I realized that this house was empty, too.

Cursing angrily, I turned away; there

was nothing for it but to foot it back again. And then I saw a thing which pulled me up sharp; a small window to one side of the front door was open. I thought of that foul walk along the drive, and I made up my mind without more ado. Ten seconds later I was inside the house.

The room in which I found myself was a small cloak-room. Hats and coats hung on pegs around the walls: two shooting-sticks and a bag of golf-clubs stood in one corner. So much I saw by the light of a match, but another more welcome object caught my eye—an electric-light switch. I had already made up my mind that, should anyone appear, I would make no attempt to conceal myself, but would say frankly who I was, and my reasons for breaking in. And so I had no hesitation in turning on the light as I left and walked along a passage which led from the room. A door was at the end of it, and I pushed it open, to find myself in a vast paneled hall.

Holding the door open to get the benefit of the light from the cloak-room I saw more switches beside me, and in a moment the place was brightly illuminated. It was even bigger than I had at first thought. At one end, opposite the front door, was a broad staircase, which branched both ways after the first flight. Facing me was a large open fireplace with logs arranged in it—logs, which, to my joy, I saw were imitation ones fitted for an electric fire. In the middle stood a long refectory table, whilst all round the walls there hung paintings of men in the dress of bygone days. The family portrait gallery; evidently the house belonged to a man of ancient lineage. All that, however, could wait; my first necessity was to get moderately dry.

I turned off some of the lights and crossed to the fireplace, where I found the heat switch without difficulty. By this time I was sure that the house was empty, and, having returned to the cloak-room to get an overcoat, I took off my clothes and sat down in an armchair in front of the glowing logs.

(I know these small details seem irrelevant, but I am putting them down to prove that my recollection of that night is still perfect.)

The hall was in semi-darkness. Two suits of armor standing sentinel on either side of the staircase gleamed red in the light of the fire: an overhead cluster threw a pool of white radiance on the polished table in the center. Outside the rain still beat down pitilessly, and as I looked at my steaming clothes I thanked Heaven for that open window. And after a while I began to feel drowsy. A leaden weight settled on my eyelids; my head dropped forward; I fell asleep.

SUDDENLY, as so often happens when one is beat, I was wide awake again. Something had disturbed me—some noise, and as I listened intently, I heard it again. It was the sound of wheels on the drive outside, and of horses. It was as if a coach and four were being driven up to the door, but the strangeness of such a conveyance at that hour of the night did not strike me for the moment. I was far too occupied in trying to think what excuse I was going to make for my presence in such unconventional garb. And then, even as with a jangling of bits, the vehicle pulled up by the front door, I realized to my amazement, that my clothes had been removed.

I tried to puzzle it out—to collect myself, but before I could think what I was going to say, the door was flung open and a great gust of wind came sweeping in, making the candles on the table gutter. Candles! Who had put candles there, and turned out the electric light? And who had laid supper?

I looked again towards the door: a woman had come in, and my embarrassment increased. She swept towards the table, and stood there, one hand resting on it, staring straight in front of her. Of me she took no notice whatever, though it seemed inconceivable that she had not seen me. And then, as she remained there motionless, my amazement grew. Her dress was that of the Stuart period.

The front door shut, and a man came into the circle of light. Magnificently handsome, with clean-cut aquiline features, he was dressed as the typical Cavalier of King Charles' time. And as he stood, drawing off his driving gauntlets, I realized what had

happened. He was the owner of the house, and there had been a fancy-dress ball. Still, I was glad I had a man to explain things to.

He threw his gloves into a chair, and came straight towards me. And the words of explanation were trembling on my tongue, when he knelt down almost at my feet, and stretched out his hands towards the blaze. He seemed oblivious of my presence, but what was even more amazing was the fire itself. For now great flames roared up the chimney from giant logs that blazed fiercely.

I glanced again at the woman; she had not moved. But on her face had come an expression that baffled me. Her eyes were resting on the man's back, and in them was a strange blending of contempt and fear.

The man rose and turned towards her, and instantly the look vanished, to be replaced by one of bored indifference.

"Welcome, my love," he said, with a bow, "to your future home."

Was it my imagination, or was there a sneer in his voice?

"You honor me, Sir James," she answered, with a deep curtsey. "From a material point of view it leaves nothing to be desired."

"Your Ladyship will perhaps deign to explain?"

"Is it necessary?" she said, coldly. "The subject is tedious to a degree."

"Nevertheless," he remarked—and now there was no attempt to conceal the sneer, "I must insist on an explanation of your Ladyship's remark."

"Ladyship!" Her face was white, and her eyes, for a moment, blazed hatred. "Would to God I had no right to the title."

He shot his lace ruffles languidly.

"Somewhat higher in the social scale, my love," he murmured, "than Mistress Palmer of Mincing Lane. The latter is worthy, no doubt—but a trifle bourgeois."

"Perhaps so." Her voice was shaking. "At any rate, it was honest and clean."

He yawned.

"They tell me your father is a pillar of respectability. In fact, I gather there is a talk of his being made an alderman, whatever that obscure office signifies."

"You coward!" she cried, tensely. "How dare you sneer at a man whose shoes you are not worthy to shine."

He raised his eyebrows and began to laugh silently.

"Charming, charming," he remarked. "I find you vastly diverting, my love, when you are in ill-humor. I bear no malice to the admirable Palmer, whose goods I am told are of passing fair quality. But now that you have become my wife I must beg you to remember that conditions have changed."

He reverently lifted a bottle, encrusted and cobwebby.

"From the sun-kissed plains of France," he continued. "The only other man in England who has this vintage is His Grace of Wessex. Permit me."

SHE shook her head, and stood facing him, her hands clenched.

"What made you marry me, Sir James?" she said, in a low voice.

"My dear!" he murmured with simulated surprise. "You have but to look in yonder mirror for your answer."

"You lie," she cried. "I have but to look to your bank for my answer."

For a moment his eyes narrowed. The shaft had gone home. Then, with an elaborate gesture that was in itself an insult, he lifted his glass to his lips.

"What perspicacity!" he murmured. "What deep insight into human nature! But surely, my dear Laura, you must have realized that a man in my position would hardly have married so far beneath him without some compensating advantage."

She turned white to the lips.

"So at last you have admitted it," she said in a voice hardly above a whisper. "Dear God! How I hate you."

"The point is immaterial," he cried harshly. "You are now Lady Mertonbridge; you will be good enough to comport yourself as such."

But she seemed hardly to have heard him; with her eyes fixed on the fire she went on almost as if talking to herself. And her voice was that of a dead woman.

"Lady Mertonbridge! What a hideous mockery! Two days after that travesty of a service I found you kissing a common tav-

ern wench. A week later you were away for two nights, and I overheard your man and my tirewoman laughing over it. Whose arms did you spend those nights in, Sir James? Which of your many mistresses? Or was it perchance Lady Rosa?"

He started violently and then controlled himself.

"And what?" he asked softly, "may you know of Lady Rosa?"

"There are things that reach even Mincing Lane, Sir James," she answered. "Even there your infatuation has been heard of and the barrier that stood between you—no money. I do not know her; I hope I never shall. But at any rate she has been saved a life that is worse than death."

"Your ladyship is pleased to be melodramatic," he said angrily. "Shall I ring for your woman to prepare you for bed?"

"A moment, my lord," she answered quietly. "This matter had best be settled now."

HE PAUSED, his hand already on the bell-rope.

"You do not imagine," she continued, "that after what you have admitted tonight, I should demean myself by continuing under your roof. Maybe you think that to be Lady Mertonbridge of Mertonbridge Hall is enough for an alderman's daughter. You are wrong. I admit my father was dazzled at the thought of such a match; I admit that I was deceived by your soft words and your flattery. But now, after just three weeks, the scales have dropped from my eyes; I know the truth. You married me for my money, and now you have tossed me aside like a worn-out glove. So be it; you shall have your money. That is nothing. But you will have it on my terms."

His face was mask-like, though his eyes were smouldering dangerously.

"And they are?"

"Tomorrow I return to my father. It is for you to make what excuse you like. Say," she added scornfully, "that an alderman's daughter felt herself unfitted for such an exalted position as that of your wife. If you choose to divorce me—which would doubtless be possible with your influence—the money will stop. You may remember that that clause was inserted in the marriage settlement; a pity for you, was it not, that my father feels so strongly about divorce. So I shall remain there, still your wife, and you will receive your money."

He still stood with his back to her, trying evidently to see how his new development affected him. And then she continued:

"It will, at any rate, have the merit of saving Lady Rosa, or some other poor woman, from the hell that I have suffered. Even Sir James Mertonbridge cannot commit bigamy."

AND at that he understood, and his expression became that of a devil incarnate. If he divorced her, he lost the money; if he did not, she remained his wife. But when he turned round, his face was mask-like as ever.

"We will go further into this in the morning, Laura," he said quietly. "You are tired now, and I insist on your drinking a glass of wine."

Her strength seemed to have suddenly given out; she sat by the table, her head sunk on her outstretched arms. And even as I looked at her, with my heart full of pity, a dreadful change came over the face of the man who stood by her side. He had just seen the way out, and I stared at him fascinated, whilst my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth.

Quietly he crossed to a cabinet that stood against the wall, and from it he took a small exquisite cut-glass bottle. Then he looked at his wife; she was still sitting motionless. With the bottle in his hand he returned to the table; then, standing with his back to her, he poured half its contents into a glass which he filled with wine.

"Drink, my love," he said softly, and I strove to warn her. But no sound came; I could only sit and watch helplessly.

She stretched out her hand for the glass with a gesture of utter weariness; she drank. And on the man's face there dawned a look of triumph. Once again I tried to shout, to dash from my chair and seize the glass. But it was too late. For perhaps five seconds she stared at him; then she sprang to her feet, her features already writhing in agony.

Through the great vaulted hall there rang out one piercing scream: "You murderer" —ere she sank down clutching at the table. And with that power of movement returned to me, and I rushed at the man, to find myself lying on the floor bathed in sweat.

I STARED round foolishly; the electric lights were still shining above me. My clothes lay by the glowing logs; the refectory table was bare. The whole thing had been a dream.

Gradually I pulled myself together, though my hands still shook with the vividness of it. And then feverishly I began to get back into my clothes. They were not quite dry, but nothing would have induced me to spend another minute in that hall. The rain had ceased; the faint light of dawn was filtering through the windows by the front door. And ten minutes later, having left everything exactly as I had found it, I was walking down the drive. Anything to get away from that haunted spot.

For hours I wandered aimlessly, my mind still obsessed with the nightmare, until at half-past seven I found myself opposite a garage where a sleepy-eyed lad was beginning to stir himself. He called the owner, who promised to go out himself and tow in my car. And then I went to the inn across the road and ordered breakfast.

IT STILL seemed impossible to me that I had not *actually* witnessed that crime of years ago. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more did I believe that I *had* done so. I am not psychic; but perhaps my brain had been so attuned on that occasion that it had been receptive.

The landlord entered as I finished my meal, and proved communicative.

"Mertonbridge Hall, sir? It's about a mile away."

So I had been walking round in circles since I left.

"Funny you should ask," he continued. "Mr. Parker—the butler—has only just left. He spent the night here owing to the rain. The present baronet, sir? He's abroad at the moment. I gather things are a bit tight; same as with all of us. And Sir Bryan has always known how to spend his money. But if you're interested, sir, and you have nothing better to do you should go up to the Hall this afternoon. It's open to visitors between three and five every Tuesday, and Mr. Parker takes parties round."

And so at three o'clock I found myself once more walking up the drive. A motor-car passed me, full of Americans, another one stood at the front door. And, majestic in his morning coat, Mr. Parker received his visitors.

Fascinated, I stared round the hall. There was the chair I had sat in, there was the cabinet from which Sir James had taken the poison. And then, as my eyes glanced along the line of paintings, I saw the man himself. He was the third from the end, and he was wearing the clothes I had seen him in in my dream.

Mr. Parker droned on. I heard not one word till the name of Sir James caught my ear.

"Sir James was the third baronet, ladies and gentlemen; there you see his portrait. And it was to him that occurred a terrible tragedy in this very 'all."

HE PAUSED impressively, marshalling us with his eye.

"Coming 'ome with his bride, he dismissed his servants, and sat down to supper at that hidentical table you see there in the middle of the room. Now, Sir Humphrey—Sir James' father—whose portrait is hanging next to him, was a great traveler. And he had collected, in the course of his wanderings, some rare antiques, which I am about to show you."

I was standing by the cabinet before he reached it, and he looked at me suspiciously.

"You see that bottle, now containing nothing more 'armful than water. But in those days it was filled with a deadly poison, manufactured by the Borgias themselves. Now what 'appened is not exactly clear, but it seems that after Sir James had pointed out the beauties of the collection to his young bride, he left her for a while to go upstairs. Suddenly a scream rang out, and dashing down, he found her dead

on the floor. Distracted and 'eartbroken, he gazed wildly round, and found the bottle on the table, 'alf empty. What had 'appened can only be guessed at. Not wishing to frighten her, he had not told her that the bottle was filled with poison. And she, taking it out—it was specially made to taste good by them Borgias—must have thought it was some rare old liqueur. Anyway, she drank some; and there on the night of her 'ome-coming, she died."

So that was the story Sir James had told—and got away with!

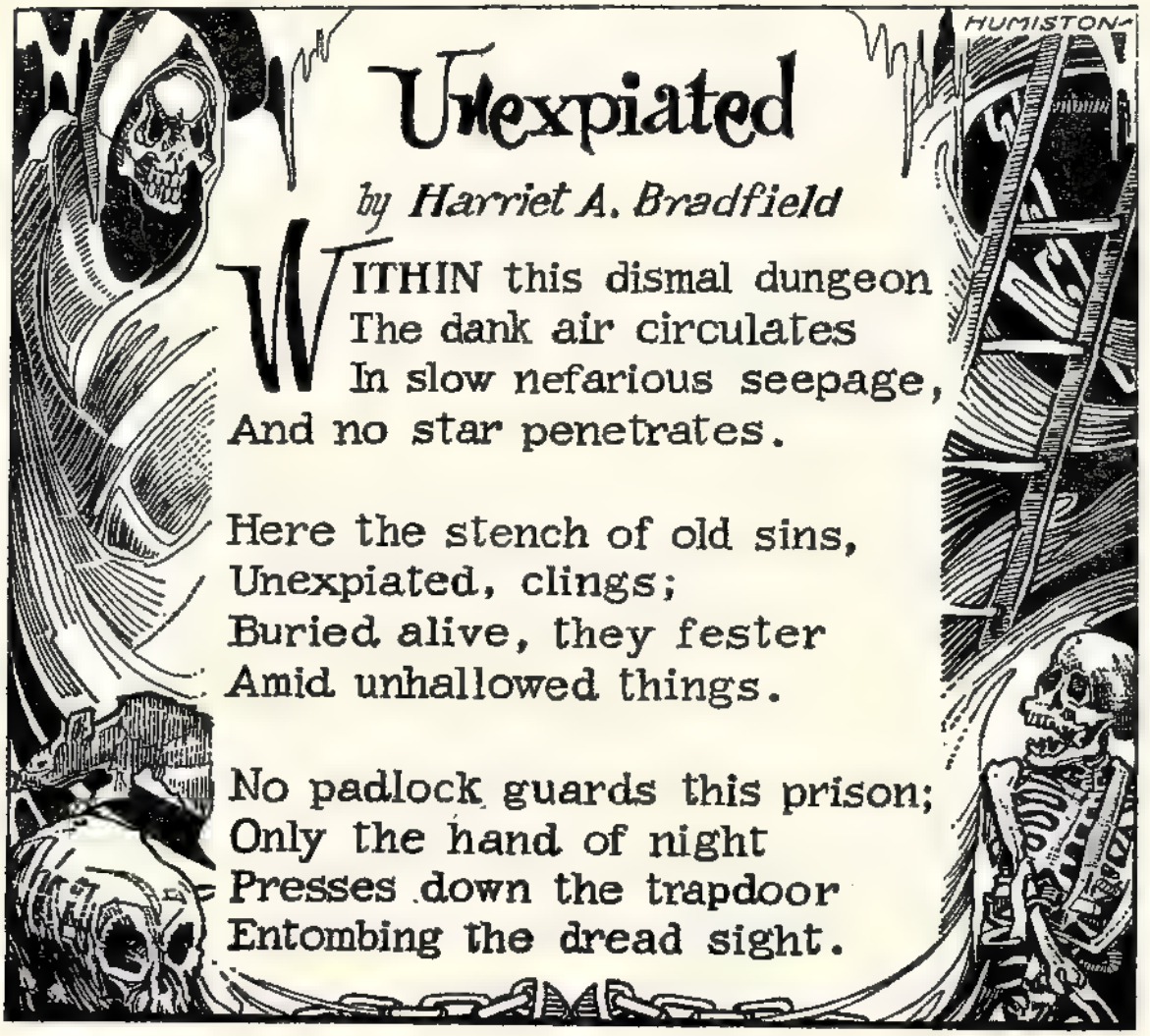
"Months after, when his grief had lessened," he continued, "Sir James married the Lady Rosa Ferrington, and their eldest son—Sir Thomas—you see 'anging next his father—"

"I suppose," said a voice, "that it was an accident. No question about its being murder, was there?"

They all stared at me, and I realized the voice was mine.

"The Baronets of Mertonbridge 'All do not murder their wives," said Mr. Parker, icily.

"This hain't the movies, young man," remarked a stout woman, with a permanent sniff, indignantly following Mr. Parker's flock, and I could have laughed aloud.



. . . a professional lecturer with a zombie audience

When the Night Wind Howls

BY L. SPRAGUE de CAMP and FLETCHER PRATT

DOC BRENNER came in just as Mr. Jeffers was delivering himself explosively.

"Psychiatry, phooey!" he said. "Psychology, phooey! Psychoanalysis, phooey! They're a bunch of witch-doctors. All they do is substitute one phony belief for another. It wouldn't do him any good."

"What wouldn't do who any good?" said Doc Brenner. "I will start the evening with a double Manhattan, Mr. Cohan."

"Dr. Bronck here," said the stoop-shouldered and tweedy Professor Thott. "Dr. Bronck, meet Doc Brenner. He's a medical man and may be able to put you onto the person you want."

Brenner shook hands with a tall man who had an alligator-like smile, graying hair worn a little longer than normal, a vest edged with white piping and a pince-nez on a black ribbon. "How do you do?" said this individual in a low tone, and glanced apprehensively over his shoulder toward the back of the room, where two other customers were playing pinochle at a table. In a still lower tone he said, "I fear this young man is right. I doubt whether a psychiatrist would be the right person for my case."

"What seems to be the trouble?" asked Brenner, downing his double Manhattan and putting the cherry into his mouth.

He addressed Dr. Bronck, but it was Thott who answered. "He has a bad case of zombies."

"Zombies?" said Brenner.

"Zombies!" said Jeffers.

"Only one to a customer," said the bartender, firmly. "I am not forgetting the night that poor young felly, Mr. Murdoch, come in here and I let him have three of them. Him and his dragons!"

"It's all right, Mr. Cohan," said Thott. "As a matter of fact I'll have a Scotch and soda, myself. We weren't ordering, just discussing real zombies—the un-dead, as they call them in 'Dracula.' "

"Is that what they call zombies after, now?" said Mr. Cohan. "Sure, it's a disgraceful thing, putting the name of a corp to good liquor."

Brenner cleared his throat, and looked at Dr. Bronck. "Do you see them?" he asked.

"No, they see him," said Thott, once more speaking for his acquaintance, and as the latter again looked over his shoulder at the pinochle players. "I suppose I had better tell him about it, Fabian. It might be something that could be cured by a throat operation." Dr. Bronck shuddered; Thott turned to Brenner:

"He's really in a cruel dilemma, since he's a professional lecturer and things have

become so bad that he hardly dares raise his voice above a whisper these days. We thought perhaps a psychiatrist—Jeffers snorted audibly into his beer—might be able to resolve the problem by reference to something in his past; but it is equally possible that the question is purely medical. We would value your opinion.

"I'm sure you must have heard of Dr. Bronck, even if you haven't met him before. No? That's because you're too exclusively a city mouse, Brenner. You should get out into the heart of America sometime, around among the ladies' clubs, and places adult education is conducted on the basis of attending one lecture a week all winter. You will find Dr. Bronck better known there than Albert Einstein, and considerably more intimately. Dr. Bronck is a travel lecturer.

"Especially with regard to Egypt and the Holy Land, a subject on which he is uniquely qualified to speak, by reason of having studied for the pastorate of the Dutch Reformed Church. Why didn't you go on with it, Fabian?"

DR. BRONCK whispered something behind his hand to Thott.

"Oh, yes, I remember you telling me now. He felt he could carry a more meaningful message to his audiences, and they would be more interested, if he did it in a secular way. It is his view that when people pay to hear a thing, they will accept it more readily and give it more thought, than when it comes to them, so to speak, as a gift. In fact, one might call Dr. Bronck a secular religious teacher. He is very successful at it, and has been heard by many thousands; I believe that they have frequently been forced to turn people away from his famous *Breakfast in Bethlehem* and the equally praised *Sailing in the Steps of St. Paul.*

"Both these lectures, like others in Dr. Bronck's repertoire, have been given so many times in the course of the thirty years he has been on the platform that his delivery of them has become practically automatic. It is his custom, I understand, not to alter so much as a word. When he returns from one of his summer trips he works up an entirely new lecture for the delectation of those audiences who have already heard his previous list, but will not willingly forego the privilege of having Dr. Bronck with them again.

"It is thus apparent that the text of what he has to say can in no way be responsible for the extraordinary affliction that has come upon him. Neither can it be his voice alone. Many years ago, at the very outset of his distinguished career, Dr. Bronck underwent a course of instruction at the Della Crusca Institute of Polyrhythmic Vocal Culture to improve both his speaking voice and his knowledge of English. The tonal habits he acquired at that time have changed only so much as advancing years would allow; when he delivers a lecture, it is identical with the last previous reading of the same text, not only in the words used, but as to gestures, intonations and pauses. Do I exaggerate, Fabian?"

Dr. Bronck shook his head, beckoned to Mr. Cohan, and pointed to the glasses. "More libations, good Boniface," he said in a stage whisper.

"It is possible that his voice alone might have a hypnotic effect on certain individuals under the right conditions. It is also possible that the subject matter may in some way combine with the voice, but I am at a loss to account for the—spreading of the contagion.

"However—Dr. Bronck spent his summer in the Holy Land that year, retracing the footsteps of Saul and David. It was something he had done before, but on this occasion he was putting the whole thing onto color film, including the famous cave of the Witch of Endor, for his lecture entitled *Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders of the Old Testament,* which is so much appreciated throughout the South.

The lecture is one that he had delivered in previous years without provoking untoward incidents, and then dropped for some time because he had only slides to illustrate it. He revised it somewhat for reappearance on the list, and it made the sensational success that is usual with Dr. Bronck's lectures." (Dr. Bronck smiled his ample, tooth-displaying smile, ducked his head slightly as though acknowledging ap-

plause, and said: "Thank you" in a small voice.)

"I do not believe he noticed the change in the reception of this lecture at first, though if he had it is difficult to see how he could have avoided the trouble that later arose. The change came about as gradually as the emergence of a forest fire from a single dropped cigarette, and its origin is as hard to trace as the point where the cigarette was dropped.

"LOOKING back over it, Dr. Bronck is inclined to believe that the first manifestation which forced itself upon his attention was when he gave *Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders* in Birmingham. Am I right about it being Birmingham, Fabian? At the end of a lecture it is his custom to have a question period, since a part of his popularity is due to the feeling of personal acquaintanceship he leaves with his audiences. Many people, of course, do not wish to stay for this period, so when the lights are turned on and he says '. . . and so, my friends, we take leave of the Holy Land and return to our workaday world,' there is a certain amount of movement toward the exits. This was true at the Birmingham lecture; but two men in the audience, instead of leaving in the ordinary way by the doors at the back of the hall, marched straight up and out the emergency exit at the side of the speaker's platform.

"At the time Dr. Bronck was extremely busy with his questions and the incident only flicked at his attention as a minor discourtesy which he noted out of the corner of his eye. It was only later, when the matter became more important and he was trying to remember details, that he realized that something odd about the appearance of the pair had registered on his subconscious memory. They were staring straight before them and lifting their feet very high as they walked; and Dr. Bronck recalls the thought flashing across his mind in the fraction of a second that both men must be drunk.

"What is it, Fabian? . . . Oh, yes, he says it is not unusual to prepare for a religious lecture in the South by the liberal ingestion of corn liquor. People seem to feel that it enables them to attain more readily the emotional state desirable for receiving a revelation. Which reminds me, Mr. Cohan, our emotional states require a little bolstering. Will you see to it?

"On that circuit a lecture at Birmingham is usually followed by others at Tuscaloosa, Selma, Montgomery, and Mobile. Dr. Bronck recalls nothing of special interest about the first three, but at Mobile, where the lecture was held in the open air under a tent, the Birmingham incident was repeated —that is, men shouldered out straight past the speaker's platform when the lights came up. Only this time there were four of them instead of two, all walking in the same peculiar dazed manner. Again Dr. Bronck was too busy with his questions to notice the incident except as one makes a mental remark upon a repeated peculiarity. It was not until he had covered Pensacola and Tallahassee and swung up to Waycross, Georgia, that the matter really forced itself upon his attention.

"At Waycross, seven or eight people, men and women alike, nearly half a row, stood up and marched out when the lights came on. They used the normal exit at the rear of the hall this time, but Dr. Bronck was looking directly at them, and he could not miss the fact that the whole group, who had been sitting together, left with the same high step and fixity of vision he had remarked at Birmingham and Mobile.

"After he had finished the usual post-lecture reception at the home of one of the social leaders of Waycross and was in his hotel room, restoring his emotional state, he connected the occurrence with the two previous incidents. As he did so, something struck him with prodigious force. Two of the four men of Mobile had also been present at Waycross, and as nearly as he could recall, the same two were the pair that had pushed past the speaker's platform at Birmingham. Then he remembered also that in all three places he had given the same lecture—*Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders*. At Selma and Pensacola, where the audience exhibited their admiration of Dr. Bronck in the normal manner, he had given *Breakfast in Bethlehem*, and at Tuscaloosa,

Montgomery and Tallahassee, it was *Sailing in the Steps of St. Paul.*

"You may judge that it was with some trepidation that he approached the next reading of the unfortunate *Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders* lecture, which was scheduled for Columbia, South Carolina. As soon as he reached the platform and began looking over the audience in the few minutes while being introduced, his fears were justified. The same two men were there, now sitting in the middle of a row of people, all of whom seemed to bear a family resemblance, in that their faces had a curious colorless character. They were perfectly well-behaved, merely sat there with their hands in their laps, waiting for him to begin; did not even applaud when the chairman finished his introduction and Dr. Bronck stepped to the podium. And when he had finished, they marched out in single file, the whole row of them, moving as though they had been hypnotized or stunned.

"HOWEVER flattering it is to a lecturer when part of his audience follows him from place to place, it is a somewhat unnerving experience to be a focus of attraction for a growing group of people who look as though they had just come from a graveyard, and who are not really there to listen to the lecture, but to be thrown into a state of ecstatic catalepsy by the lecturer's voice. Not to mention that Dr. Bronck felt felt his position as a religious teacher might be compromised by such events, which, although not altering the value of his teaching, might be taken in the wrong spirit by the unthinking.

"By time he reached Asheville and there were twenty of these persons in the audience, Dr. Bronck was more than a little disturbed. It was evident that the people who are normally his hearers had begun to notice the intrusion of these peculiar characters, and were not taking it too well. And it was also apparent that the effect of the lecture on these individuals was impermanent; they reached their period of exaltation after hearing Dr. Bronck for an hour, and then the effect apparently gradually wore off, so that they had to have the dosage renewed. He was thus being pursued about the country by a retinue that was growing embarrassingly.

"Upon consideration, he decided that in a manner which he could by no means explain, the zombie effect was produced by the lecture *Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders of the Old Testament.* By telegraphing ahead, he managed to persuade his sponsors at Lynchburg, Virginia, to accept *Breakfast in Bethlehem* instead. His special group was present, larger than ever, not having been advised of the change, but he was relieved to see that only one of them —one of the original two from Mobile— left with the typical high step and fixed stare. The rest shambled out, looking at the floor, with their hands in their pockets.

"This particular tour ended at Richmond, and Dr. Bronck enjoyed a week of rest before taking a swing through New England and central New York. In the interval he waited on his agents, McPherson and Kantor, and told them firmly that he declined to deliver *Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders* again. They are notorious slave-drivers—I have been under their management myself —but they were not too averse, as audiences in the northern states require a somewhat more sophisticated and more sentimental approach, and Dr. Bronck's habit of not modifying his lectures was well established.

"He did Connecticut and Rhode Island easily, though at Bristol, where he gave *Characters of the Crusades,* he thought he recognized one of his Southern friends in the audience. At Worcester, however, he was shocked. The lecture was *Sailing in the Steps of St. Paul* and his eye, now attuned to looking for it, caught the zombie effect in at least two of those present. One of them was definitely a person who had attended one of the *Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders* lectures in the South.

"You will understand that Dr. Bronck has little opportunity to make personal observations of the thousands of people who come to hear him, except as they are unusual in some way. But the Worcester experience was shocking because at that point he realized that his peculiar clientele had not deserted him when he ceased to give

Sorcerers and Spiritual Leaders. They had merely been following him and accustoming themselves to the accent of his voice until anything he said in any lecture would produce the effect they desired.

"At Albany, he felt himself on safe ground again, having given *Breakfast in Bethlehem,* but at Utica, where he gave *Sailing in the Steps of St. Paul,* there were four who left with the cataleptic march, and by time he reached Binghamton and *Characters in the Crusades,* the number had become eight.

"HE MANAGED to finish this tour, which terminated at Buffalo, without having his private audience attract too much attention from the others and, after another brief rest, went out for a trip along the Pacific Coast, which had no incidents except for the simultaneous exhibition of the zombie effect on almost a third of his audience in Los Angeles. It was fortunately the last lecture of the year; he believed that he had conquered whatever influence was at work—at least on audiences above the Los Angeles level—and happily embarked for Rome, where he spent the summer in working up a new lecture."

(Dr. Bronck abruptly emitted a loud burp and motioned for the refilling of his glass.)

"Yes, Fabian, I know. Mr. Cohan will take care of the matter. In the fall, the first tour arranged for him was through Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. I believe it opened at Columbus, did it not, Fabian? Dr. Bronck had just arrived in the city and was seated in his hotel room, restoring his emotional state, when he received a telephone call. It was a man's voice, with the sugary accent of the deep South; he said that he had heard Dr. Bronck lecture during the previous year, and wished to discuss a theory with him. The theory was that the world had really been created in 1932, complete with records and people whose memories indicated an earlier existence. Now this sort of thing happens rather frequently to lecturers, as good God, I know, and Dr. Bronck put up the standard defense, which was to say that he was engaged, with somebody in the room. But the man was persistent, and Dr. Bronck was forced to enter upon explanations. After a minute or two he asked some semi-rhetorical question, ending with "Wouldn't it?" or something like that, and was rather surprised to get no answer. He called "Hello!" two or three times, still without drawing any reply. There was no click of the phone hanging up; just nobody answering at the other end. That night—"

"That night was bloody awful," said Dr. Bronck. "I need a drink when I think of it."

"Indeed, it must have been awful, Fabian. There were at least twenty of the gray-faced people in the audience, and although the lecture was the new one he had made up in Rome, *Children of the Catacombs,* every single one of them got up and went out with the sleep-walker gait. They had apparently been increasing their sensitivity by practicing with transcriptions of Dr. Bronck's voice. Or perhaps, during the summer in Rome, the voice itself had acquired the additional richness and timbre necessary to the easy production of the zombie effect, regardless of the words spoken.

"At Dayton, Dr. Bronck found the numbers of his special audience tragically increased, and at Cincinnati, where he gave *Breakfast in Bethlehem* in an effort to dismiss them for one night at least, he found that they had attuned themselves even to this lecture. He gave but one more public lecture—at Lexington—after which he wired to McPherson and Kantor that he was suffering from a severe nervous breakdown, and would have to cancel the rest of the trip. He—"

"THAT isn't the worst, my friend," said Dr. Bronck, his voice showing evident traces of the improvement in his emotional state. "That isn't the worst at all. They try to telephone me; at all hours of the day and night they try to telephone me. They ash—ask questions—where is the Mount of Gibeon? Wha' line of march did the Israelites take under Joshua? My friends, it is a conspiracy to keep me talking until the wire goes dead. They meet me on the public streets in their cerements of a

forgotten world. They are ruining my professhion; they are depriving me of the privilege of carrying joy to many souls in spiritual need. They form associations and besiege my agents with requests that I speak before them—calling themselves the Arcane Adepts of St. Louis, or the Blavatsky Circle of Los Angeles—they offer me fabulous sums to pander to—"

His voice had risen, and as he flung out one arm in an oratorical gesture, "Look!" said Doc Brenner, suddenly, and pointed.

The two pinochle players at the back had dropped their cards. With arms at their sides and heads held back, staring straight before them with unwinking eyes, they were marching toward the door, each foot carefully lifted and placed before the other.

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

• Write to MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY •

• This is your club—a medium to help you and other fantasy and science-fiction fans get together. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

NEW MEMBERS

P. Dodd, 41 White Horse Drive, Stanley Green, Poole, Dorset, England
Mrs. E. Woaland, 29 Payton Road, Handswith, Birmingham 21, England
A. C. Hopcraft, A. G., 2438266, Flying Wing Orderly Room, R. A. F. Watton, Nr. Thetford, Norfolk, England
Norman M. Veigh, 74 Mount Street, Woodstock Road, Belfast, N. Ireland
Richard Turner, 1562 Van Lee, Mobile 19, Alabama
D. Thomson, 16 Coniston Road, Reddish, Stockport, Cheshire, England
G. T. Have, 16 Brendon Ave., Chamberlain Road, Hull, Yorkshire, England
Miss Doreen M. Clinging, The Overcliff Guest House, Dawlet Road, Teignmouth, S. Devon, England
Leith Garcia, 9 McWhinney, Street, Kingston-Jamaica, British West Indies
Miss Cathie Broad Pey, 20 Nerston Avenue, South Poffok, G. Pasgow S. W. 3, Scotland
Miss Marion Kimmins, 20 Nerston Avenue, South Poffok, G. Pasgow S. W. 3, Scotland
Matthew McKay, 13 Chapel Street, Brighton, 1. Sussex, England
James Keatings, 40 Hantley Street, Oldham, Lane, England
Goodwin K. Cobb, Route No. 1, Morrison, Oklahoma
Miss Marian E. Gordon, 4654 North Kenmore, Chicago 40, Illinois
Jim Fisler, Box 113, Albany, Oregon

(Continued on page 92)

FANTASY MOVIE STILLS
from "Frankenstein," "Dracula," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Thing" and many others.
Send for free list.
HISTORIC CINEMA SERVICE
272 W Hyland Street, Cresskill, N. J.

LOVECRAFT
Beyond the Wall and Outsiders
Fine condition, best offer gets; also old FFM and FN.
IRVING SMITH
437 Walnut, Long Beach, California

WEIRD—SCIENCE-FICTION—FANTASY
New and Out-of-Print Books
Mundy—Haggard—Wheatley—Griffith—etc.
Send for List
FANTASY BOOKS PURCHASED
S. B. MYERS
904 FOREST AVENUE ANN ARBOR, MICH.

I'VE GOT THEM ALL! ! EVERY ONE! !
ALL the Science-Fiction, Fantasy and Supernatural Books in Print in America or England!! I can supply anything you see mentioned, listed or offered anywhere!! Visit my store and inspect the Largest Variety of Brand New Books of this kind in the World or send 10¢ for my Big Printed Checklist of 984 titles including 94 Paperbound books at 25¢ each up.
FRANK A. SCHMID
9 Columbus Circle, New York 19, N. Y.

AMAZING NOVELS
25¢ EACH
SINISTER BARRIER by Eric F. Russell. Over 50,000-word complete novel of *unknown terror!* ..... 25¢
THE GARDEN OF FEAR by Robert Howard. 5 thrilling complete *fantasy and weird adventures.* ..... 25¢
NOT FOR THE SQUEAMISH by D. S. Moncrieff. 9 *horrifying tales of satanism, vampires,* etc. Over 36,000 words! ..... 25¢
Thrill to 1 or all 3 great paper-cover booklets!
NUTRO-20 by Frank Norris . . . an extra-long *amazing fantastic novel!* Over 300 pages! (cloth) ..... 50¢
ALL FOUR COMPLETE NOVELS ONLY $1.00
Write TODAY for our FREE catalogs of Weird & Fantasy Books!
READERS SERVICE BOOK CLUB
119 E. San Fernando St. (Dept. W-9) San Jose 13, Calif.

MAKE BIG MONEY PLASTICS LEARN AT HOME

LEARN HOW TO MAKE fast selling PLASTIC NOVELTIES FURNITURE JEWELRY SIGNS TOYS LAMPS

There are RICH OPPORTUNITIES for MEN and WOMEN with "know-how" in Plastics. Interstate's amazing new Plastics course tells and shows how to make hundreds of fast selling items out of Plastics. Gives complete training in fabrication, casting, lamination, molding, etc., in simple, easy, step-by-step language and pictures.

START A PLASTICS BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN. No other industry holds such promise for the future. You can make big money manufacturing novelties, toys, signs, etc., in your own home in spare or full time. Don't wait! Learn NOW how Interstate's Plastics Training qualifies you for success in the plastics field.

Write for FREE Information Today!

INTERSTATE TRAINING SERVICE
School of Plastics
PORTLAND 13, OREGON
Dept. C-11K

Free Book
MOUNT BIRDS, ANIMALS, FISH

MAIL Postal Today

Yes, FREE. Explains Taxidermy. Tells how to learn at home by mail to mount birds, animals, heads . . . to TAN skins and furs. Great for MEN and BOYS. Fun! Also earn money in spare time. WRITE TODAY—NOW—for free book containing 100 game pictures. State AGE. N.W. School of Taxidermy, Dept. 4210 Omaha, Nebr.

New CHEAP OIL BURNER

FOR COOKING & HEATING STOVES-FURNACES
HEAT YOUR HOME, COOK YOUR MEALS WITH CHEAP FURNACE OIL

NO MORE SHOVELING — LIFE-TIME GUARANTEE
New Fuelizer Starter Vaporizing System turns Cheap Furnace Oil, Distillate, etc., into Oil Gas Heat. BIG BONUS OFFER FOR TEST. ING. Big Profits. We will let you try it in your own stove or furnace for 1 month. Get yours for introducing. Be First. Send your name today. NORTHWEST MFG. CO., 402-M Main, Mitchell, South Dakota.

LAW STUDY AT HOME for Business Success and LARGER PERSONAL EARNINGS, 42 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance"—NOW!

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. B-43, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Illinois

How to Make Money with Simple Cartoons

A book everyone who likes to draw should have. It is free; no obligation. Simply address FREE BOOK

CARTOONISTS' EXCHANGE
Dept. 4810, Pleasant Hill, Ohio

RUPTURED?

New invention—soft flat pad moulds to body, holds with gentle pressure. No steel—washable—don't show. Full price $1 single, $2 double. Order today. Start enjoying real comfort. Inclose money with hip measurement. $1

Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Back
P. F. DOLLAR TRUSS CO., Box 812, Oakland 4, Calif.

TOOTHACHE?

"Since 1888"

Quick relief with Dent's. Use Dent's Tooth Gum or Dent's Tooth Drops for cavity toothaches. Use Dent's Dental Poultice for pain or soreness in gums or teeth. At all drug stores.

DENT'S TOOTH GUM TOOTH DROPS DENTAL POULTICE

(*Continued from page 91*)

Derrick Wray, 25 Cregswell Lane, Stainciffe, Jewsbury, Yorkshire, England
Miss Iris Inglis, c/o Mackie, 98 Golspie Street, Glasgow, S. W. 1., Scotland
Andrew R. Legori, Box 117, Mohegan Lake, New York
Miss Clara Jakowski, 291 Lorimer Street, Brooklyn, New York
F. Atkinson, No. 1 Mulgrove Street, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, R of Ireland
Ck. (S) B. Shaw, PISMX 849935, 5 MESS, H. M. S. Sr Vincent, Gasport, Hants, England
L/Corporal G. C. Cement No. 890551, 40 Squadron, Royal Engineers, Court-7-Gollen, Abergavenny, South Wales, United Kingdom, England
Mrs. Zola Barber, 372–62nd Street, Oakland, California
Richard Tufts, c/o Halifax Herald & Mail, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
Gordon Tomney, 32 Gardenside Crescent Carmyle, Glasgow, E. 2, Scotland
Whyne Foster, 105 1st Street, O. P., Montgomery 6, Alabama
Stephen L. Barstow, 2258 N. Claybourne, Chicago, Illinois
Melvin J. Rodham, 2258 N. Claybourne, Chicago, Illinois
John Gutteridge, 57 Hawkins Road, Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex, England
R. V. Ware, 36 Carlyle Avenue, Brighton, Sussex, England
Frank Sullivan, 1679 Dundas St. W, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Eric Rigley, 1, Commercial Terrace, Awsworth Road, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, England
Miss Marguerite B. Faustini, Filikon Street, Dato-Varos, Famagusta, Cyprus
Miss Christine Spencer, 27 Melrose Avenue, Fairview, Dublin, Ireland
Miss Francine King, 3468 Fenton Avenue, New York 67, New York
Emil Schmidlin, 212 Clairmont Terrace, Orange, New Jersey
James Lowe, 45 Pievna Street, Falls Road, Belfast, N. Ireland
Anthony P. Hastings, 580 Gallowgate, Glasgow, Scotland
Eric W. Blackmore, 12 Council House, Aslacton, Norwich, Norfolk, England
Dennis H. Pratt, 5 Albion Terrace, Exmouth, S. Devon, England
Dennis Brogden, 15 Manstond Place, Thornbury, Bradford, England
David Rike, Box 203, Rodeo, California
Don Kanaby, Editorial Room, Chicago, Illinois
Miss Norma McNeill, 3465 Archer Avenue, Chicago 8, Illinois
Miss Lenora Mehner, 3509 Clark Avenue, Cleveland 2, Ohio
Miss Rita Joyorian, 2010 Newkirk Avenue, Brooklyn 26, New York
Miss Virginia M. Skinner, 419 West 34 Street, New York 20, New York
Eugene Adams, R. F. D. 1, Box 225½, Fairfax, Virginia
Lawrence R. Campbell, 43 Tremont Street, Malden 48, Massachusetts
Richard Nystrom, 3 Echo Street, Malden 48, Massachusetts
Don Preston, 17347 Steel Avenue, Detroit 21, Michigan
Carl Fey, 64 N. Millick Street, Philadelphia 39, Pennsylvania
Ray Wooten, 1136 Maple Avenue, Longview, Texas
Pvt. Karl F. Funderburk, RA19 354 566, H & S Co., 41 ADB, Ft. Hood, Texas
A. Hart, Jubilee Road, Forest Green, Nailsworth Stroud, Glos., England
R. L. Barbet, 396 N. Bluff, Wichita, Kansas
John Thomas Dalie, 100s North Fountain Avenue, Springfield, Ohio
M. E. Banfill, Rose Cottage, Sandy Lane, Tilford, Nr. Farnham, Surrey, England
Miss Glenne Marten, General Delivery, Penticton, B. C., Canada
Miss Marlene Bowers, 114 Third Street, Shamokin, Pa.
Robert Daley, 308 Kellogg Street, Syracuse, New York
June Superak, 1513 2nd Avenue, Beaver Falls, Pa.
Norman D. Causey, 2061 Raymond Avenue, Signal Hill 8, California
Edward Cooper, 69 Cunningham Park, Harrow, Middlesex, England
John Cookson, 115, North Road, Withernsea, East Yorkshire, England
Ted Cookson, 115, North Road, Withernsea, East Yorkshire, England
Joe Melton, 1061 South New Avenue, Springfield, Missouri
Barry Sayers, 8, Hubert Street, Withernsea, East Yorkshire, England

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I just bought the September issue of WEIRD TALES *today and haven't had time to read the stories yet. I have read The Eyrie, however, and I would like to comment on some of the letters. (Why can't we have more of them? The letters are the best part of any magazine.*)*

First, I am in complete agreement with Joseph Wilcox. There is a big difference in science-fiction and fantasy. Many people miss the distinction because there are many stories that successfully combine the two, but it's still there. It's a bit hard to put into words but once you have noted the difference, it becomes easier and easier to classify a story.

I'd really hate to see WEIRD TALES *devoted to science-fiction. There are any number of magazines on the stands today that use only s-f, but very few using only fantasy. Magazines printing only weird fantasy are scarcer still. I prefer weird fantasy to any other type of fiction, but it's hard to get except in the old classics that are so hard to obtain. If you must run s-f, please use only outstanding stories. There is so much s-f available today that* good *science-fiction is hard to get. Good fantasy, on the other hand, is not much harder to obtain than poor fantasy. There isn't much of either.*

Mort Paley's suggestions, with the exception of using science-ficton, were very good. I agree, too, with Ronald Morris, who votes

*Authors please note.—Editor WEIRD TALES.

If SLEEPLESSNESS
(Due to Nervous Tension)
MAKES YOU FEEL
LONG FACED and DULL
. . . try Miles Nervine—Take it also for a sleepless night or nervous headache. Contains no Barbiturates nor other habit forming drugs. Follow the label. Avoid excessive use. At all drugstores.
MILES NERVINE

CARBURETOR TOO RICH
MAKES MOTORIST TOO POOR

Car owners who are wasting money and not getting proper gas mileage due to over-rich mixtures will be pleased to learn how to save gasoline by VACU-MATING over-rich mixtures. VACU-MATIC fits all cars, trucks and tractors. It is *automatic* and operates on the supercharge principle. Easily installed in a few minutes.
SALESMEN WANTED! Big Profits! Send name, address on penny postcard for *free particulars* and how to get yours for introducing.
VACU-MATIC CO., 7817-1782 W. State St., WAUWATOSA, WIS.

SEND FOR THIS FREE!
Make money. Know how to break and train horses. *Write today for this book FREE*, together with special offer of a course in Animal Breeding. If you are interested in Gaiting and Riding the saddle horse, check here ( ) *Do it today—now.*
BERRY SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP
Dept. 8410 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

Find HIDDEN TREASURES
GEIGER COUNTERS for Uranium Detection (see at left). TREASURE DETECTORS for gold, silver, etc. Lightweight, ultra sensitive. None finer at ANY PRICE.
INFORMATION FREE.
Detecton CO. Dept. 10-X
5631 Cahuenga, No. Hollywood, Calif.

MEN PAST 40
Too Often Neglect Indications of ILL HEALTH
Watch yourself for unusual aches and pains. Such disturbances as pains in back, hips and legs, unusual tiredness, nervousness, dizziness, physical inability or sleeplessness often may be traced to glandular inflammation.
The Excelsior Institute, a medical institution devoted exclusively to the treatment of diseases of older men, has a revealing FREE Book. It tells how many hundreds of men yearly are finding soothing and comforting relief from their ailments and a new outlook on life. This FREE Book gives factual knowledge that could prove of utmost importance in the later years of your life. No Obligation. Address
Excelsior Institute, Dept. 7781, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

When Nothing Else Will Help for Acid Indigestion

Doctor specialists who treat nothing but stomach trouble say that a formula like Bell-ans tablets often gives comforting relief when everything else fails. Billions of Bell-ans tablets have been taken for 50 years by grateful thousands who tell their friends of the quick relief Bell-ans brings for gas, heartburn and acid indigestion. Get a package of Bell-ans tablets at your druggist's today and find the relief you've been looking for. 25c only.

Cut out this ad and send to Bell & Co., Dept. 6, Orangeburg, N. Y. for free sample of Bell-ans and Novelty gift.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept H749, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

FLORIDA: Several 5 acre tracts high and dry. Raise fruits and vegetables, 60 miles from St. Petersburg and Coast. Fine Fishing and swimming. Only $245. $10 down, $10 a month. For details write G. B. Potterfield, Union Bldg., Charleston, West Va.

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 to 60. Many Swedish Massage graduates make big money! Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums, clubs or private practice. Others made good money in spare time. Prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for Diploma. Anatomy charts and 32-page Illustrated Book FREE!

The College of Swedish Massage
Dept. 195-M, 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11

EXCHANGE NECKTIES! Send us 5 ties in good condition that you dislike. We'll mail you 5 different cleaned ties we received from someone else. Then you pay postman $1.00 plus postage. If you indicate color or style preference, we'll try to satisfy. **TIE-X-CHANGE, 5458 N. 5TH ST., PHILADELPHIA 20, PA.**

INVENTORS

If you believe that you have an invention, you should find out how to protect it. We are registered Patent Attorneys. Send for copy of our Patent Booklet "How to Protect Your Invention," and an "Invention Record" form. No obligation. They are yours for the asking.

McMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
1583 Victor Building Washington 1, D. C.

MAKE $27.50 A DAY

EVEN beginners sell 50 full-value Famous Christmas Card Boxes a day and make $27.50! Up to 100% profit with Imprint Cards, Stationery, Napkins and Gift Items.

FREE PACKAGE CHRISTMAS GIFT CARDS 32 PAGE MONEY-MAKING CATALOG

Write for complete selling outfit on approval.

FREE! SAMPLES 40 for $1 NAME IMPRINTED CARDS NAPKINS STATIONERY

ORGANIZATIONS, Write for Fund-Raising Plan

[illegible] Dept. 0-28 200 FIFTH AVE. N. Y. 10, N. Y.

for the hair-raising, spine-chilling type of story. I like the kind of story that leaves you wondering at the end if such a thing could be possible. . . .

*I like your covers. There was one some time ago that really took my fancy; on the November, '50, issue, I believe. It was all in green and showed a woodland creature of some sort blowing on pipes and dancing. Remember?**

I certainly am glad that WEIRD TALES *hasn't resorted to half-clad females on the cover. It's not that I really object to them, but the covers you are using now are so much nicer.*

I wish all English teachers would take the attitude Ronald Morris mentioned. It's a bit difficult to make book reports that are acceptable and still don't bore me to tears while I'm writing them.

I enjoyed the weird crossword. Please use more of these and make them larger. I finished it in a little less than five minutes.

. .Your magazine as a whole is one of the finest ones published today. I've read it for some time and have enjoyed every issue. The stories are almost always above average, and even the poorer stories make enjoyable reading. Please keep the standard as high as it is now and by all means go monthly if you can keep on giving us the same WEIRD TALES *we are buying now.*

Marian Cox,
Hilton Village, Va.

---

*Of course. The cover on this issue is by the same artist.
—Editor, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I have been enjoying WEIRD TALES *for two years. I have, nevertheless, telescoped about a six-year span of your output into that period, since I have bought (and read) all back issues that I could find on the second-hand magazine stalls.*

I view with growing alarm the fact that in your more recent issues, some of your formerly best writers are contenting themselves with turning out monotonously stereotyped rehashings of Cthulu Mythology formulas.

I am shocked to see that in your May,

1951, issue, you have abandoned your long-standing "No Reprints" policy; I wish you would go back to it, and extend it to include "No Rehashes!"

By way of padding the blow, I wish emphatically to state that I consider the average literary standards of WEIRD TALES *very high. There has usually been at least one real gem in each issue. Robert Bloch's "The Weird Tailor" (July, 1950) was exceptionally fine—a powerful, imaginative narrative; the character descriptions, alone, of the sullen, brutish tailor and his apathetic, downbeaten wife, were such as to make it hard to believe that the same author produced the piece of pure corn, "Notebook Found in a Deserted House," (May, 1951).*

By the way, what has become of Mary Elizabeth Counselman? Her stories are often superb ("The Smiling Face," January, 1950; "Cordona's Skull," July, 1950) and always competent.

One of your most unusual short-shorts—a psychological mood-piece well worth anthologizing—was "The Last Train" by Fredric Brown (January, 1950).

Palmer D. French,
11 South Russell Street,
(Suite No. 3)
Boston, Massachusetts

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I have been for about two years a spell-bound reader of W. T., *which I find a source of life to a mind like mine, so open to the supernatural. And I have also received the little green card of membership in the* WEIRD TALES *Club.*

Now I want today a little service, which I hope you will do for me. I have never come across in the list of WEIRD TALES *Club members any with a Mexican address. If any reader with such an address reads this, won't he—or she preferably—write to me? I should love to communicate with people in Mexico, ever since reading your January, 1950, issue.*

I should also like to say two words of appreciation for H. Russell Wakefield's "A Black Solitude" in March, 1951. Such glori-

MAKE CRIME YOUR BUSINESS

ON THE SIDE OF THE LAW!

Help fight crime! . . . Earn steady good pay as a Finger Print Expert or Investigator. I.A.S. trains you—by easy, low-cost home study lessons. Learn this exciting work in spare time. Write for full details now!

OVER 800 POLICE BUREAUS...

Employ I.A.S.-trained men . . . proof of what I.A.S. can do. Write today (state age) for details. No obligation. No salesmen will call.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
Dept. 2247, 1920 Sunnyside Avenue
Chicago 40, Illinois

MEM-O-RITER

Only $2.00

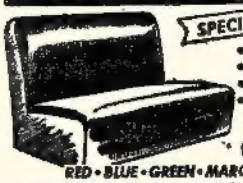
New! Handy!

paper and pencil in one!

A complete writing outfit. All contained in a single handsome plastic and gold-plated automatic pencil that fits pocket or purse, yet it holds 36 inches of memo paper. A flick of the cap and the paper appears. Tear it off and you're ready to write!

ORDER NOW—only $2 each, plus 15c for postage and handling. Refills—set of 6 rolls, 25c. (On pre-paid orders add 15c for postage and mailing.) If not satisfied, return within 10 days and your money will be refunded.
QUALITY AGENCY 270 Park Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

AUTO SEAT COVERS



SPECIAL OFFER! 2.98 COUPE OR FRONT SEAT

• Waterproof • Stainproof • Greaseproof • Resists Burns

"MIRACLE PLASTIC" 6 LUSTROUS COLORS

RED • BLUE • GREEN • MAROON • LEOPARD • ZEBRA

Complete Set FRONT AND REAR $5

Add instant class to your car! Snap-on action holds 'em tight. Color fast. No fade! No shrink! Wash with damp cloth. SEND NO MONEY! Order TODAY at our risk! Give year and make of car, 2-door, 4-door, or coupe, and color preference. Pay postman plus postage. Or send Cash, Check, or Money Order and We Pay Postage! Keep 10 days—return for full refund of purchase price if not fully satisfied, but HURRY—this offer can't last!

FREE! TRY 10 DAYS IN YOUR CAR

YOUNG PRODUCTS

Dept. 9-H, 2605 Elmhurst, Detroit 6, Mich.

MAKE EXTRA MONEY

EVERY BUSINESS EVERYWHERE USES UNION LABEL BOOK MATCHES

No experience needed to earn big daily commissions. Be a direct factory representative of the world's largest exclusive UNION LABEL Book Match manufacturer. Prospects everywhere. Feature Glamour Girls, Hillbillies, scenics and dozens of other styles—Double Books—Jumbo Books—nearly 100 color combinations. New, bigger portfolio makes this fastest selling line a real profit maker for you. Write TODAY for full details.

SUPERIOR MATCH CO.

Dpt. S-1051, 7528 S. Greenwood Ave., Chicago 19, Illinois
West Coast Salesmen, write Box 1087, San Jose, Calif.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

on credit. Your own boss. 1437 Dealers sold $5,000 to $28,500 in 1950; their average $6,704. We supply stocks, equipment on credit. 300 home necessities. Selling experience unnecessary to start. Wonderful opportunity to own pleasant, profitable business backed by world wide industry. Write RAWLEIGH'S, DEPT. U-PBL, Freeport, Illinois.

be an invisible reweaver

MAKE BIG MONEY AT HOME

Profitable hobby and trade—earn over $20 daily full or part time—repair cuts, tears, rips, burns in clothing or any fabric so hole can't be seen. Big profit, big demand—uncrowded field. Low-cost home-study course includes lifetime equipment. Easy-to-learn, pay-as-you-earn. Income all your life. Details free. Send postcard today.

FABRICON CO. Dept. D
8342 S. Prairie Ave., Chicago 19, Ill.

Fistula May Often Result From Piles

FREE BOOK—Gives Facts On Associated Ailments

A new, illustrated 40-page book on Fistula, Rectal Abscess, Piles and other rectal and colon disorders is now FREE to all sufferers. Write today—a card will do. Thornton & Minor Hospital, Suite 1005, 911 E. Linwood, Kansas City 3, Mo.

*ous discoveries in the mystery of thought and the art of writing! Kindly remember my desire about a correspondent in Mexico.**

Margaret Beatrice Faustini,
Larnaca Road,
Narosi,
Famagusta, Island of Cyprus

*We print this letter here in the Eyrie so that Miss Faustini's request may reach our readers; Cyprus to Mexico ought to prove an interesting exchange.—Editor, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

The September, 1951, issue of WT was good.

Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin tale, "The Ring of Bastet" was, of course, the best story. It was easy to see why "A Square of Canvas" by Anthony Rud was reprinted. Both novelettes were very good, with C. A. Smith's a shade the better. "Camel Vengeance" was unusual and fine.

Eldon K. Everett,
Tacoma, Washington

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Finding a new Clark Ashton Smith story in the September number was a pleasurable surprise, he appears all too infrequently of late, while the appearance of Anthony Rud's classic study of a madman, "A Square of Canvas" was about all that was needed to insure my complete enjoyment of the issue. I wonder if it would be possible for you to reprint from your files any of the following; "Teoquitla the Golden" by Ramon de las Cuevas, "The Supreme Witch" and "The Church Stove at Raefrudabusk" both by G. Appleby Terrill and also Pendarve's "The Eighth Green Man"—I'm sure all of these would be well received by the newer readers.

Winchell Graff,
300 West 67th Street,
New York, 23, N. Y.

BIG MONEY

WRITING ORDERS FOR AMAZING NYLONS

GUARANTEED AGAINST EVERYTHING

The world's ONLY complete, nationally advertised nylon hosiery line actually guaranteed against runs, snags or excessive wear, REGARDLESS OF CAUSE! It's amazing, but true! No matter what the cause—hard use or deliberate abuse—Kendex nylons are replaced FREE if they run, snag or become unfit for wear within entire guarantee period! Every weight from sheerest 15 denier to heavy 70 denier—all gauges up to luxury 60 gauge—all sizes, lengths, popular shades, fancy heels—full fashioned and seamless. How could any woman possibly resist saving money and solving her hosiery problems? NOT SOLD IN STORES. Men and women wanted NOW, spare or full time, to write orders and earn big money. You can get orders even if you never sold a thing in your life!

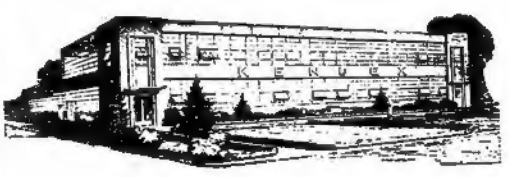
NEW SLASHED PRICES!

3 PRS. GUARANTEED NYLONS 2.95

Just imagine—first quality nylons, GUARANTEED AGAINST EVERYTHING—for less than a dollar a pair! This includes postage, your commission and bonus! Every day, women pay 50% more for this same quality hosiery in stores, *without any guarantee at all!* How can any woman say "No" to savings like these? Writing orders isn't "selling", it's like giving them away.

FREE STOCKING

YOU can easily earn steady income, spare or full time. No money or experience needed. We supply EVERYTHING FREE and set you up in business at OUR expense. Nothing to buy or deliver. Write orders. We deliver and collect. Big advance pay plus huge cash bonus that increases your earnings up to 40%! Your name and address on postcard will bring you sample stocking; self-selling sales books with FULL COLOR illustrations; 32-page salesmanual showing you easy steps to success; color cards; special plan to have others sell for you, etc., etc. You can start making money the minute you receive the complete FREE outfits!



YOUR COST ONE CENT!

SEND NO MONEY. Pay nothing now or later. No obligation. Not even a promise to return outfits. Simply write your name and address on a penny postcard and mail to us. We'll immediately rush you everything you need FREE and postage prepaid. WRITE TODAY!

KENDEX CORPORATION • BABYLON 49, N. Y.

ALL 3 FOR $1

When You Join the Dollar Book Club! 3 Brand-New Best Sellers . . . $9.00 Value in Publishers' Retail Editions!

WHAT A BARGAIN! This big Triple-Thrill package of book entertainment—for only $1! THREE new, full-size, handsomely bound best-sellers by America's "big-name" authors—total value $9.00 in publishers' retail editions! A big, generous sample of the fascinating reading and the huge savings offered by the Dollar Book Club. Just mail coupon below to accept this offer.

MAIL THIS COUPON

DOUBLEDAY ONE DOLLAR BOOK CLUB
Dept. 10PFG, Garden City, New York

Please enroll me as a Dollar Book Club member. Send me at once **The Nymph and the Lamp, Proud New Flags** and **Joy Street**—and bill me only $1 FOR ALL THREE, plus a few cents shipping cost.

With these books will come my first issue of the free descriptive folder called **The Bulletin**, telling about the new forthcoming one-dollar bargain book selections and other bargains offered at $1* each to members only.

I have the privilege of notifying you in advance if I do not wish either of the following months' selections. The purchase of books is entirely voluntary on my part. I do not have to accept a book every month—only six a year. I pay nothing except $1 for each selection received, plus a few cents shipping cost.

Mr. / Mrs. / Miss } ..... Please Print

Address .....

City & Zone ..... State .....

Slightly higher in Canada: address 105 Bond St., Toronto 2. Offer good in U.S. & Canada only.

The Only Club That Brings You Best-Sellers for Just $1!

THE DOLLAR BOOK CLUB offers to send you *The Nymph and the Lamp, Proud New Flags* and *Joy Street*—ALL 3 FOR ONLY $1—as a generous sample to new members of the wonderful values the Club offers for only $1 each.

Yes, the very same titles costing $2.75 to $3.50 in the publishers' editions come to members for only $1—an incredibly big saving averaging two-thirds on each selection!

TAKE AS FEW AS SIX BOOKS A YEAR!

Membership in the Dollar Book Club requires no dues of any kind. You do not even have to take a book every month; the purchase of as few as six books a year fulfills your membership requirement.

Upon receipt of the coupon, you will be sent your introductory TRIPLE package of books—and you will be billed a total of only $1, plus a few cents shipping cost, for ALL THREE. Thereafter, you will receive regularly the Club's Bulletin, which describes the forthcoming Club selections, also other books offered to members for only $1.

SEND NO MONEY — JUST THE COUPON!

When you see your TRIPLE book package—and realize these books are typical of the values offered by the Club for only $1 each, you will be delighted to have become a member. Mail the coupon now!

Doubleday One Dollar Book Club, Garden City, New York